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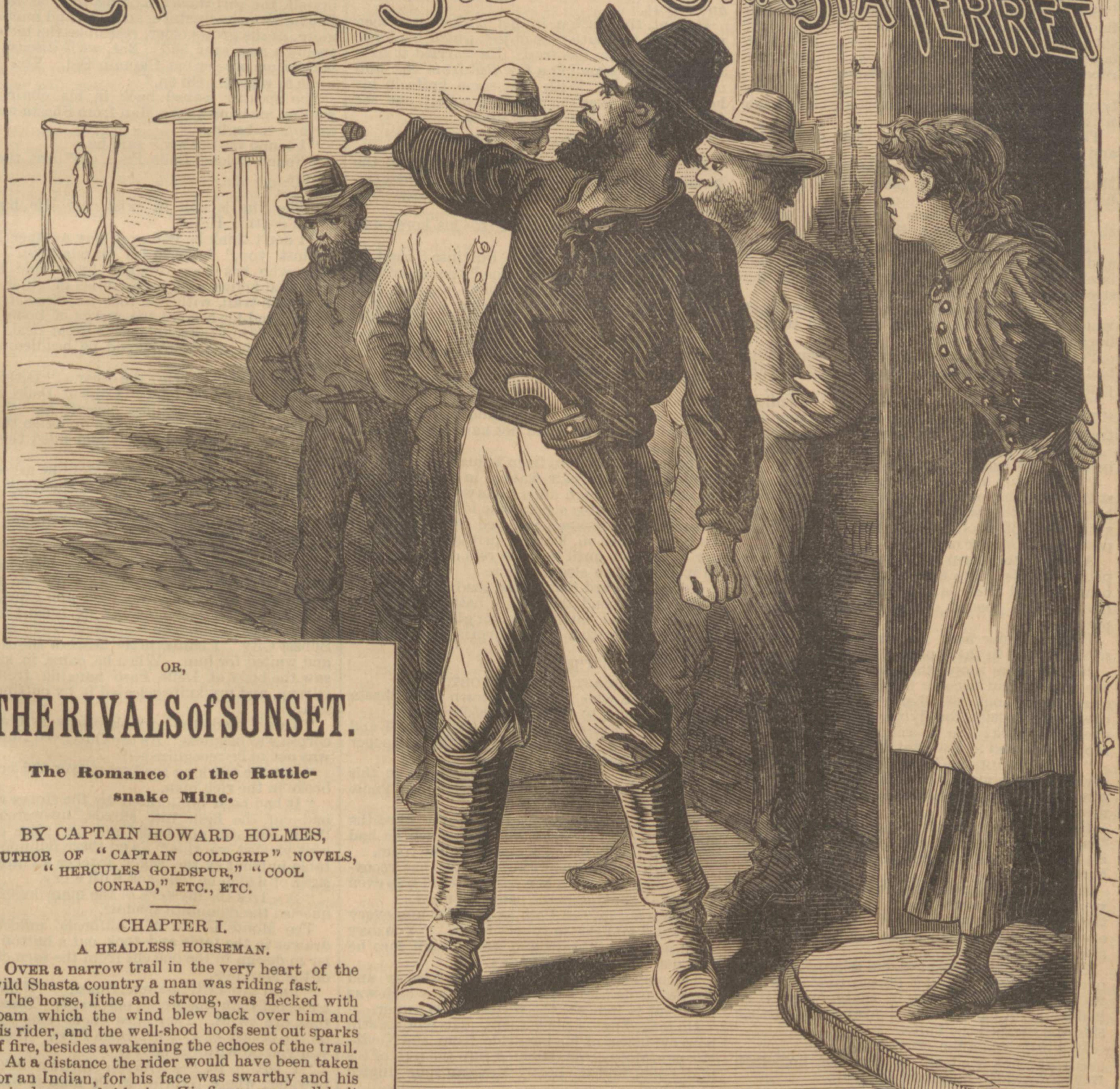
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CAPTAIN SID THE SHASTA FERRET



OR,

THE RIVALS of SUNSET.

The Romance of the Rattle-
snake Mine.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP" NOVELS,
"HERCULES GOLDSPUR," "COOL
CONRAD," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A HEADLESS HORSEMAN.

OVER a narrow trail in the very heart of the wild Shasta country a man was riding fast.

The horse, lithe and strong, was flecked with foam which the wind blew back over him and his rider, and the well-shod hoofs sent out sparks of fire, besides awakening the echoes of the trail.

At a distance the rider would have been taken for an Indian, for his face was swarthy and his hair long and black. His figure was well-knit and shapely; his eyes dark and piercing. He wore no adornment of any kind; his face was

THE YOUNG MINE QUEEN LEANED FORWARD AND LOOKED BEYOND THE DEAD LINE AT WHAT SHE KNEW WAS AN EFFIGY OF HERSELF.

Captain Sid, the Shasta Ferret.

smooth, and the mass of hair which escaped from his hat framed it in ebony.

He wore the dark shirt and the high boots of the Shasta miner, though his soft hands did not indicate hard work. He might have been forty, though his looks were no index to the years he had seen.

The rider entered a ravine without altering his speed; the loose stones on the trail did not make him lose his footing. Instead of sitting straight in the saddle like an accomplished horseman, the stranger bent toward the ground, now on this side, now on that.

His searching eye seemed to see every rock, to scrutinize every inch of ground.

Here and there were dark stains on the stones. In one place the stains would not be larger than a finger-nail, in others they would have half-covered one's hand.

Beyond the gulch the solitary rider found these spots confined to tufts of grass and the leaves of mountain bushes. Not one of them escaped his eye.

On, on he went.

The sun would soon drop behind the wooded slopes on his left.

"He's taken a long ride," said he to himself. "Unless he gets loose, or the horse stops, I shall not find him for some time. But, I'll keep the trail until I reach him. I never quit a trail this side of the end. I'm here to find horse and rider!"

The speaker galloped across a pretty little valley, and plunged again into the mountains.

Now the scenery became rougher. It was a succession of canyons and gulches, with lofty walls so straight that no vines adhered to them. In some places they towered for a thousand feet above.

The dark stains on the rocks were conspicuous now for their infrequency. Occasionally he saw them, however, and at the discovery his searching black eyes seemed to get new light.

"Still going toward Sunset," he laughed. "Am I to come up with him there? I wanted to find him alone among the hills, where I could turn back unseen and unquestioned. But, if it is not to be so, I'll make the best of it, and my report will be delivered all the same."

His horse, now, for the first time within an hour, showed that he heard something besides the noise of his own hoofs.

The strange Indian-looking rider drew rein and listened.

"Coming back, eh?" he exclaimed. "Is my Mazeppa going to favor me with a meeting here?"

Nearer and nearer came the unseen steed as the sounds told the man in the saddle.

He had drawn his horse from the open trail, and with eyes gazing down the canyon he had lately entered, he waited for a glimpse of the steed he knew was not far away.

Far ahead he could see a handful of light which told where the canyon ended and the sky began again, as it were.

Presently the light disappeared; something had come between him and the mouth of the canyon.

"This is Echo Canyon, sure enough," he smiled. "They say a wolf can't traverse it without betraying his presence. I'm sure a man cannot."

There was plenty of room for a horse to pass between him and the opposite wall.

"I can stop him if necessary," he went on, still facing the object now moving down upon him while the whole canyon rung with the swift beat of hoofs. "I'm here for that purpose, and to see for myself!"

At last the form of a rushing horse was plainly visible. The animal, a pure black, with head up and nostrils distended, came forward like a horse goaded on by mingled fear and pain.

The lone rider near the canyon wall waited with triumph in the depths of his eyes.

He had seen more than a horse. Although the canyon had become filled with shadows, he could make out the figure which was being dragged alongside the flying animal, bounding over the rocks like a rubber ball, with one foot imprisoned in the fatal stirrup.

"I don't want the horse," said the watcher, giving audible utterance to his thoughts. "I'm after the man, and a happy cut will do the business."

He had drawn a knife and now leaned toward the center of the trail, with the hilt clutched in his left hand and his eyes upon the approaching horse.

He seemed to know that it would take good work, a steady nerve and a quick eye to sever the stirrup-strap as the steed dashed by, but if ever there was a man made for such an occasion he was the one.

The horse that dragged his stirrup-Mazeppa over the ground did not appear to see the man waiting quietly for him in the canyon. If he had he might have swerved toward the further side and escaped the knife.

In a little while the crisis came.

All at once the body of the lone horseman went toward the middle of the trail.

He saw the foot imprisoned in the stirrup; he may have noticed how the heavy boot was wedged into the unyielding clamp, and a down-

ward glance have shown him the dreadful thing being dragged over the ground.

Suddenly, as the two horses met, the knife shot toward the empty saddle; there was a powerful cut, a strange sound as the leather parted, and the black horse, dashing on, had left his burden in the bed of the canyon!

"A success!" chuckled the dark-faced operator, throwing the rein forward on his own steed's neck and slipping from the saddle. "Eye and hand did not fail me this time."

In another moment he was bending over the object on the ground, and the relieved horse had disappeared.

He had not looked a second ere an exclamation of horror parted his lips.

The clothes of the stirrup's prisoner hung in shreds; the hands were bits of jagged flesh, and there was no head!

It was the latter discovery which had drawn the cry of horror from the lone rider.

The battered body lay on the flinty ground, bleeding no longer: it had passed that stage. What had once been a handsome man was now a mass of mangled flesh, cut to pieces by the sharp rocks and roots of the mountain trail.

"I did not expect this; but, no difference," said the stranger. "He can be identified;" and he divided the remnants of clothes that covered the dead man's breast and seemed to look for something, a mark of some kind perhaps, over the heart.

A look of disappointment passed over his face. He found nothing that looked like a mark beyond those of the rocks of the trail.

But he did find something that seemed to compensate for this failure.

A button of a certain kind still clung to a bit of embroidered jacket. He jerked it off and looked searchingly at it a few moments.

"They were after him; I know that!" exclaimed he. "He rode a black horse, and wore buttons like this one. It is he! I have found Delle Paso, the outlawed nabob. I can go back and report."

He put the button in his pocket and then picked up the loathsome object which his knife had dropped in the trail. He carried it to a huge boulder standing a few feet from the wall of the canyon. With the same knife in his hand, he bent over the rock and rudely cut the following inscription on the stone:

"DELL PASO, May 12th, 188—."

Already he had deposited the body of the headless horseman behind the stone. It had fallen out of sight, and a clump of rank weeds had closed over it.

The stranger went back to his horse and mounted.

"I didn't have to follow him into Sunset to have a lot of fools question me," he muttered as he rode away. "I'll now have a clear ride back, and he will sleep better than he has for a year past. But I don't call my work done. No! I have found but one of them. There were three. If I'm not mistaken, Shasta Sid, your trail has just begun."

He went back over the blood-bespattered ground he had lately traversed. He no longer looked at the stains on rock and verdure. The sun had set, and he could not have seen them if he had looked.

The night hid him from human eye; but he kept on, his black hair waving in the wind, and his hat perched high upon his tawny forehead.

Three days later a man who looked very like this strange horseman galloped into San Francisco, and kept on, looking neither to the right nor to the left, until he drew rein and dismounted in front of an elegant house.

He ran forward and jerked the bell.

The next second there were hasty footsteps in the hall beyond, and the young girl who opened the door fled with a cry of surprise and terror.

CHAPTER II.

SHASTA SID'S REPORT.

THE man who had come down from Shasta allowed a smile to lit across his dark face.

While it lingered he strode into the hall and halted among the shadows there like a trooper waiting for orders.

"I did not expect to frighten Manon in this way," muttered he. "The girl must know something."

The next moment he heard a door toward the end of the corridor open, and the person he had just surprised came once more into the room.

Though her face was still pale, she had recovered somewhat from her fright; there was even a smile at her lips as she came forward.

"He is not in, but I am looking for him every moment," said she, in silvery tones. "You may walk into the library and wait. I am sure he was not expecting you to-day."

The man touched his hat to the speaker and stepped aside into a handsome room, which was sufficient to indicate the wealth of its owner.

He looked out of place there. His clothes still bore evidences of his long ride from the North. His pantaloons were sticking into the tops of his high boots, and the heavy Mexican spur jingled at his heel.

Left alone by the girl, whose soft, olive complexion and deep black eyes made her, one might

say, dangerously beautiful, Shasta Sid cast himself upon a sofa and stretched his legs across the carpet.

"He wasn't looking for me, she says," he muttered. "Well, I reckon not. But I'm here to report. After three months of trailing in the Shasta country, I'm back in his golden palace. Of course he'll be glad to see me. I was not to come back without something definite. I guess I bring him that, ha, ha, ha!" and before the chuckle of satisfaction died away there were footsteps beyond the library door.

As the portal opened, Shasta Sid left the sofa and waited for the new-comer.

A handsome man of five-and-fifty walked into the room. Although the afternoon was nearly gone, and the light was not very strong in the library, there was still enough to show the Californians to each other.

The man who greeted the dark rider was tall and powerfully built. A full beard, with much gray in it, covered his face below a pair of deep grayish eyes, and fell over his breast.

He came forward with a springy step, and eagerly grasped the hand which was thrust out to him.

"I've been waiting, Captain Sid!" he exclaimed. "Three months without any tidings make a long time."

He went to a sideboard and took from its ample shelves a bottle and two glasses.

"You must be dry," he went on, breaking the bottle's green seal.

Sid's wistful look was answer enough.

It took a few minutes for the two men to get down to business. The man from Shasta was allowed to quench his thirst without stint or interruption, and when he had finished he dropped into a chair which had been drawn up to the table for him.

"I frightened Manon when I came!" he laughed.

"Did you?" replied the other with a slight start, and a quick glance at the door. "Like myself, the girl wasn't looking for you to-day. She's a strange creature, anyhow, and more and more, as she grows older, resembles the bitterest enemy a man ever had. But, we'll discuss this point some other time, Captain Sid. You have come to report? Go on."

The speaker leaned back in his chair and waving his hand at the Man from Shasta waited for him to begin.

"I found the outlaw," said he.

"Found Colonel Delle Paso, eh?" was the response.

"Yes."

"Then, he is still in existence? He has escaped death? He—"

"I don't think he will ever play another hand against you," interrupted Shasta Sid. "A man who has been dragged by a mad horse over God knows how many miles of gulch and mountain-trail, with one foot imprisoned in a stirrup and his head at the mercy of hoofs and rocks, isn't apt to trouble one a great deal. Besides this, if the man should be headless when found—"

"Was he thus?" cried the other. "Is this the glorious news you fetch? Colonel Delle Paso, the modern Satan, headless beneath his stirrup? By Jove! Captain Sid, we can drink on that!"

He caught up the bottle and filled the two glasses with wine.

"Who sent him on his last ride?" he asked.

"The Shadows of Shasta," was the reply.

"Who are they?"

"A mountain puzzle," smiled Shasta Sid.

"But his enemies?"

"They seem to be everybody's foe. As I was saying, they sent Delle Paso on his last ride. I came across his trail some time after the start. There were blood-stains on rock and grass, and I followed the horse as far as Echo Canyon where I heard him coming back from toward Sunset City. I halted in the heart of the canyon and waited for him. When he came in sight I saw the body of Delle Paso hanging from the stirrup, and my knife released it by cutting the strap,

"Then I made the horrible discovery that the corpse was headless. As the Outlawed Nabob it was not to be recognized—"

"But the mark on the breast over the heart?" broke in the rich man.

"It had been obliterated by the stones which had cut the flesh into shreds," answered Sid. "But, this did not baffle me. A piece of the coat yielded me this." And there fell upon the table in front of the eager listener a button, at sight of which he fell back with a cry.

"It solves the mystery of the man, doesn't it?" queried the mountain shadow.

The Monte Cristo of California unlocked a drawer in the table and took out a button similar in design to the one cut from the torn clothes of the Mazeppa.

"I am satisfied!" he exclaimed. "What better proof than this would one want? These buttons are twins. They once shone side by side on the breast of Colonel Delle Paso. What did you do with the body?"

"I left it in the canyon thrown behind a boulder, where Gabriel won't miss it when he comes."

The Frisco nabob laughed.

"What about her?" he asked, suddenly serious again.

Sid shook his head, as he answered: "Nothing definite."

"And Teton Sam?"

"I didn't find his trail. I came back from the headless horseman of Echo Canyon. I've been on his trail these three months, losing it now, and now finding it again. When I discovered that the Shadows of Shasta were on his track, I kept close to their heels, for nothing eludes them in the long run."

"Who is their leader?"

"No one knows."

"What is their mission?"

"That, too, is as much a mystery as their identity."

Silence fell between the two for a minute.

"What about Sunset City?" suddenly asked the nabob.

"It has become the abode of wolves," answered Shasta Sid. "A dividing line runs through the middle of the place from east to west. On this side are the Philistines, on that more Philistines, ha, ha!"

"Dog against dog, eh?" laughed the rich man.

"It's not all dog on one side," returned Captain Sid quickly. "The south end of the camp has one redeeming feature: Stella is there."

"And who is Stella?"

"A young girl about Manon's age, but not so dark. They call her the Star of Shasta, and she holds fifty wild men in thrall by her beauty and her mysterious powers. The quarrel began over her. She is the person who split the Philistines of Shasta Land and set them by the ears. The girl owns the famous Rattlesnake Mine. She has worked the rich vein until it has run under the dividing line of the camp. With the courage of a desperado, she has refused to stop her men. Of course this has renewed the fight."

"Is the Rattlesnake worth fighting for, Captain Sid?" and the Monte Cristo of California leaned eagerly forward as he put the question.

"It is the marvel of the county," replied the dark detective. "A dozen men have died for it, already. The girl faces the toughs with more grit than most men show. Her life has been in danger a thousand times. She has refused the offer of a body-guard—"

"Where did she come from?"

"No one seems to know."

"What is her age?"

"Twenty, I should say."

"So young as that? Manon's age exactly."

"They don't resemble one another, though. Stella's skin is light; her eyes a deep, delicious, blue."

"Of course she has a lover?"

"I think not."

"A champion, then?"

"The fifty men who stand about her are her champions."

"I never heard of anything like this."

"Nor I," smiled Shasta Sid.

"How is the quarrel likely to end?"

"The girl will lose unless soon reinforced."

"Why so?"

"Her men show signs of weakening. If a strong mind and hand would come to the rescue—"

"A mind and hand like mine, Captain Shasta?"

The man from the north looked in amazement at the speaker. The fine face of the Frisco nabob was seriousness itself.

"I mean what I say," he went on. "I haven't always been here in this big city living in luxury and rolling in wealth. I've roughed it a good deal in my career. I'll rust out if I remain where I am. You have found Delle Paso; you have failed to discover a trace of Teton Sam. The woman—the bane of my past—has vanished; but I've got her living likeness beneath my roof. My child, Manon, is the counterpart of that Jezebel—the living image of that Hecate. By heavens! Captain Sid, I've felt sometimes like strangling the girl. She has Leone's eyes, her color, her figure— In short! she is the new curse come to plague me!"

Before Captain Sid could reply a wild cry fell upon his ears, and the California Croesus, bounding across the carpet, jerked open the door.

"I thought so!" he laughed, looking back at his ferret who came forward. "Here is the woman's image," and he pointed at the figure of Manon lying at his feet.

"Go down to the best hotel and wait for orders," he continued. "You are still in my employ. You are going back to the Shasta country, Captain Sid, but not alone!"

CHAPTER III.

THE EDGE OF THE STORM.

SUNSET CITY was almost within the shadow of mount Shasta.

It was little more than a mountain camp like others that nestled among the golden-ribbed hills of California, and like those others, it was a hard place.

As Captain Sid told the Monte Cristo of San Francisco, Sunset City had a dividing line. It

ran east and west through a collection of cabins that made up the place—a deep line cut into the earth by miners' picks, one side for the party who espoused the cause of the young girl known as Stella, the other for their enemies.

If the mountain sharp whom we saw following the trail of the dead Mazeppa in our first chapter had kept on a few miles further he would have reached the home of the factions; but, as seen, the black horse turned back enabling him to complete his hunt among the shadows of Echo Canyon.

We have naught to do with the bloody encounters which took place along the dividing gully prior to the opening of our story. The rivals of Sunset had met a dozen times and more on the divide and it had been drenched in the blood of the bravest.

More than once a beautiful girl, not past twenty—a girl with a lithe, yet well-formed figure, and deep crystal blue eyes—had stepped between the combatants and struck aside the bowie and the revolver.

The population of Sunset City was about equally divided. The malcontents numbered fifty to a side; but the girl's foes promised to win in the long run.

At nearly the same moment when the Frisco nabob bade Shasta Sid go to the hotel, there to wait for orders, a turbulent scene was brewing on the disputed territory.

About a certain cabin which stood a few yards south of the divide half a dozen stalwart men were assembled. They were typical toughs in gray shirts, high boots, broad-brimmed felt hats and bronzed skins. Not a few were bearded to the eyes, and all were fully "heeled."

"This last straw has broken the camel's back!" exclaimed a man who stood nearly seven feet in his cowhide boots.

He was known as the Tall Redwood, and his stature did not belie his name.

He addressed his remarks to a girl, now standing in the doorway of the cabin—the Star of Shasta, and the holder of the Rattlesnake Mine.

"Don't anger them," she answered the Tall Redwood in mild-mannered tones, though they had a certain firmness which did not escape the others. "Let them cool down, and it would not be a bad idea for us to cool down ourselves."

"We've done this too often," cried the man. "When we cool down they fire up. The last insult is the meanest of all. Look at it! You can see it from hyer!" And he turned and pointed toward an object dangling in the vanishing sunlight from an improvised gibbet on the north side of the line.

The young mine queen leaned forward and looked beyond the dead line at what she knew was an effigy of herself, and allowed a contemptuous smile to play with her lips.

"They can't irritate me by deeds of that sort," she replied, turning to the men. "I know whose hand is at the head of it. We'll get even with him one of these days."

"But it maddens us," persisted the giant. "Say the word, and we'll cross the dead line and cut the thing down if it takes every member of our crowd in Sunset."

Stella shook her head.

"You won't, eh?" continued the Tall Redwood, disappointedly.

"No, gentlemen. Let it hang. I know the Philistines. I can see beyond the surface of their plans. That effigy was put up for a purpose. I understand it."

The six men reluctantly withdrew, and with another look toward the gibbet, Stella went inside and closed the door.

"Who'll walk with me to the line and shoot the effigy down?" suddenly exclaimed the big man, casting a look upon his companions. "She didn't say we shouldn't do that, and my blood's been fired by the last insult."

In an instant five vociferous "I's!" rent the air, and the Tall Redwood turned toward the divide, whipping out a large revolver as he did so.

The little gully was but a few yards away, and from the spot where the Tall Redwood halted the effigy of the beautiful owner of the Rattlesnake was distinctly visible.

By this time six revolvers were gripped by as many hands, and at a word from the Tall Redwood, the weapons went up and covered the effigy of their queen.

"Aim at the under side of the cross-piece, where the rope is," said the big man in low tones. "One bullet out of six ought to cut the cord. Now, everybody ready? Fire!"

The six weapons spoke as one, and a loud hurrah burst from the Tall Redwood as the effigy was seen to spin half-way around and then drop to the ground.

The volley had been successful; the rope had been cut!

"They'll put it up ag'in," said one of the six.

"Let 'em! We can shoot it down jes' as often!" was the rejoinder.

"By Jove! we've stirred up the bees! I thought we would."

The last remark was called forth by the sudden appearance of a man who had already reached the spot where the effigy lay. He was in his shirt-sleeves and hatless.

While not blessed with a figure like the Tall

Redwood's, he was no pygmy, and his red beard caused him to be recognized as soon as seen.

"Crimson Clint!" exclaimed one of the Tall Redwood's companions.

"Oh, you cowardly skunks, why don't you cross the divide an' prove yer grit!" suddenly shouted the man at the gibbet, shaking his fist at the armed six. "This effigy of yer young Jezebel will go up ag'in if it takes every Philistine in this camp!"

"An' it'll come down jes' as often!" was the response. "Put it up an'see. The camel's back is broken, an' that's the straw what did it—the one at yer feet!"

Crimson Clint stepped toward the dividing line, and halting within three feet of it, showered the dark six with a lot of emphatic English. There seemed something foolhardy in this lone man defying the armed toughs who still held their revolvers in their hands; but Crimson Clint was known to have not a drop of coward blood in his nature.

The Tall Redwood and his companions knew the man, and they let him have his way, moving not until he reached the end of his tirade and had turned away.

"She'll go up within five minutes if you'll wait!" growled Clint. "I want ter see some more shootin' across the line by a pack o' cowards!"

He walked to the effigy and began to retie the rope which had been cut in two by the bullets.

"He'll put it up as sure as shootin'," said one of the watchers, with an upward glance into the immobile face of the Tall Redwood. "It's a pity Crimson Clint's on that side."

By this time more men had joined the Philistines, and the pistol-shots had reinforced the aggressive party.

Crimson Clint threw one end of the rope over the beam of the gibbet; then, while a comrade lifted the effigy from the ground, he went up the rough pole and fastened the insulting object as it had been fastened before.

"Thar it is!" he yelled, springing toward the silent group beyond the danger line, and his dark finger pointed back at the effigy. "I told yer it should go up ag'in!"

He had no weapons in his hands while he faced the crowd; but the heavy six-shooters resting on his hips were ready to leap from their "pockets" at the touch of his hands.

Everybody had stepped clear of the gibbet. The effigy of Stella swung once more in its old place, and in full view of the spot occupied by her champions, above whom towered the Tall Redwood.

"Shoot 'er down!" cried Clint, defiantly, his eyes fairly blazing while they regarded the silent and incensed crowd. "If you want a picnic cut the rope ag'in with yer bullets."

The Tall Redwood looked at the effigy and then at the men by whom he was surrounded.

"You've lied! you won't!" contemptuously continued the man north of the line. "I thought as much!" And he turned his back on the champions and walked toward his own side with a laugh cutting enough to stir the most cowardly.

"Some other time—mebbe to-night, boys," said the Tall Redwood to his followers. "The effigy's not likely ter see ther sun. We don't want ter rile 'em any more now. It's ag'in' orders, an' besides—"

"Ho! ho! ho! ha! ha!" rung out in stentorian tones, breaking the big man's sentence, and all saw Crimson Clint dancing a ludicrous jig beneath the gibbet.

The Tall Redwood led the little party off and, a few seconds later, the captain of the Philistines made a similar move.

It was not the first time the two factions had escaped a bloody encounter by a hair's breadth, as it were.

Such scenes had been common in Sunset City within the last three months, but all had not ended as bloodlessly.

The sun went down and left the effigy of Stella of Sunset hanging from the beam from which it had been shot by the pistols of her champions.

What the night would bring forth no one knew.

As darkness settled over the mountain-camp a figure came toward the girl's cabin from the north. In order to reach it from this direction it had to cross the divide—the "dead line of Shasta," as it was called.

It was the figure of a man, who, when he reached the cabin door, gave several light raps.

In an instant the door was opened, and the figure leaned across the threshold.

"Affairs have reached a crisis," the man said to the girl, who was looking at him with some astonishment. "Thus far they have been held back—you know by whom. I'll give you one hundred thousand for a deed, and guarantee safety. Besides, I'll cut the effigy down with my own bands—"

"No!" and the hand of Stella fell upon the man's arm. "I'm here to stay, and to hold the mine against the Philistines! It is my property. When it is in the market I'll let you know."

The man in the door looked at the girl, amazed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTAINS OF PHILISTIA.

THE man who had visited the Star of Shasta was one of the head Philistines of the camp. He shared with Crimson Clint the leadership of the desperate band that held the north side of the deadly line.

In years he was about thirty, in stature fully six feet, and, physically, a perfect athlete. Besides this, he was blessed with good looks, and his name, Gold Gomez, had been bestowed upon him because of his well known wealth and the few drops of Mexican blood in his veins.

For several moments after the girl's reply, he continued his stare of amazement.

That she should reject his proposition was genuine astonishment, and the rejection, spoken almost before his last word had left his tongue, was not the least surprise of all.

"I'm afraid I can't hold 'em back any longer," resumed Gold Gomez.

"Then, let them loose!" replied Stella with a smile.

"What? Do you want the worst to come? Do you want the men of Philistia to cross the line and finish the dispute once for all? It has been growls, with now and then a bite, long enough. It will be a succession of bites when the ball once opens."

"They know my rights," responded the girl firmly. "They know that the mine belongs to me. You know that, Captain Gomez."

She looked him squarely in the face as she spoke. He met her gaze a second, and then dropped his own.

"There's a question there," he began.

"There should be none," put in Stella quickly. "Why should there be? Ask yourself. What is my claim to the Rattlesnake based upon? But I won't argue the question. It has been argued a thousand times. Justice has decided in my favor, I don't want to sell. One hundred thousand dollars is no price at all. When I sell my mine, after what has happened, I sell the very principle I've stood up for."

"The men are mad. They have just held a council."

"And made you their middleman?"

"No! I came to you of my own accord. I have your safety at heart."

"My safety? Has it come to that?"

"It has."

"Then, tell them that I accept the challenge. Say to the men of Philistia that, though a woman, I will not yield my rights."

"I'm sorry," answered Gold Gomez, drawing back. "You may not know what has just occurred."

"If you refer to the shooting down of the effigy of myself by the Tall Redwood and his companions, I know. The act was unauthorized. I counseled forbearance; I commanded against violence; I know the temper of this camp, and God knows, Captain Gomez, that I would change it; but not by the sacrifice of my convictions and my rights."

Gold Gomez stood several feet from the cabin door, and for a moment meditated a hot reply. He saw the calm demeanor of the beautiful girl, and could not find it in his heart to compel it into one of excitement.

"I'll see what I can do with them," he replied. "I don't want violence to come from our side of the line. Gold Gomez is the friend of peace. Good-night, Miss Stella."

The girl said "Good-night, Captain Gomez," and watched him eagerly until his figure was hidden by the interposing cabins.

"He's about the best of a bad lot," she murmured, when the Philistine was no longer to be seen. "I believe he really wants peace. He thinks that a change in the ownership of my mine would bring it about. I don't know." Stella shook her head. "Crimson Clint stands between us and peace. He is the spark that dances over the powder."

Gold Gomez did not walk erect nor proceed straight toward the mountain dead line after quitting the girl's cabin. He was on the enemy's territory, and, therefore, on dangerous ground.

There was no telling where the Tall Redwood and his followers were. They might be on the watch, or in council in one of the cabins, and a glimpse of his form might precipitate affairs, if not cost him his life.

He dodged in and out among the shanties like a prisoner breaking through the enemy's camp.

Near the fatal line he rose erect and looked back.

"Halt thar!" rung out a harsh voice.

Gold Gomez started at the sound, and one of his hands went swiftly toward the ready six-shooter.

"Hands up, Philistine!" exclaimed the same voice.

He now saw the speaker standing not a dozen feet away—a gigantic figure in the brilliant starlight which also showed him the revolver by which he was covered. It was a time for the mind of a man to work rapidly.

"I count three," the enemy went on.

"One—"

The second numeral was not spoken for the figure of Gold Gomez dropped to the ground,

and then went toward the unknown like a cannon ball.

Taken thus, the stranger fired at random, and the following second Gomez, rising to his feet, went at him with a tigerish bound and caught him with both hands under the chin.

If the man had recognized the person he had halted he should have been prepared for a movement of this kind, for Gold Gomez was famous for his trickful agility.

His closing grip loosened the man's revolver; he shook his victim till his teeth chattered, and then dragged him bodily across the fatal line.

"I don't want your blood, though you were after mine," cried Gomez. "Go back to your own ground!" and he pushed the fellow away and laughed to see him pitch headlong south of the gully.

All this did not seem to occupy ten seconds, and once more Gold Gomez, who had saved his life by a display of nerve and dexterity, was flying past the gibbet and its effigy and in the direction of his own quarters.

He looked at the outlandish caricature of Stella as he went by. It was still hanging as Crimson Clint had left it, swaying slowly in the slight breeze, looking for all the world like a real body left by a hangman after his last job.

"The girl will pay for her stubbornness," he muttered when he reached his shanty. "She's got somebody's grit in her nature. No one knows, though, where she got it. Her father may have bequeathed it to her, but I've known people to get their courage from their mothers. Wouldn't sell me the mine for a cool hundred thousand. She'll never get that out of it while the feud lasts, and Philistia won't give in. I like her 'sand'; but it's foolish, just now. The crisis has come; I didn't exaggerate when I told her so. The men are hot again. The Tall Redwood has stirred 'em up afresh. I don't see any way out of the difficulty only to let it come."

Gomez opened his shanty door a moment afterward and looked out. He saw coming toward him a figure which he recognized on sight, and in another minute he had admitted Crimson Clint.

The two captains of the Philistines of Sunset looked at each other a moment in the light of Gold Gomez's little lamp, and Crimson Clint ran his hand through his red beard, a habit of his.

"We are going to hoist them," said he. "The council has had a second session."

"Since I left it?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"We decided to let 'em think we've cooled down. The effigy won't see the sun."

Gomez said nothing.

"The girl's spirit has got to be broken," Clint went on. "I'm tired of this show of grit on her part; but more tired of her success. If she was a man, she'd be over yonder on the hill with the dozen and three who died in their boots on account o' the disputed mine. I'm willin' yet to let her escape, if she would do so without a flourish o' trumpets. But, she won't go that way. She won't sell out; she won't surrender in any manner; and that makes her, in my estimation, no better than the meanest o' her defenders."

"She wants to hold the mine."

"But she can't!"

Clint leaned suddenly toward the table in the middle of Gomez's room, and struck it until he seemed to split the board.

"We've decided to hoist 'em!" he went on. "We've drawn up a manifesto. I shall post it on the line to-morrow."

He thrust his hand into the bosom of his shirt and drew forth a piece of dirty paper which, when opened, nearly covered the table.

"Here it is," he said with a look at Gomez. "It was drawn up with deliberation, an' received the approval of the council."

Stella's late visitor had commenced to read what was before him, and in a short time he had mastered the whole, which ran as follows:

"PROCLAMATION."

"There being in Sunset City a number of men, whose names follow this document—men who disturb the peace o' the camp—we, the Philistines of Shasta, in council assembled, hereby decree them to be public outlaws—men deserving of death without trial and on sight. We give them twenty-four hours to quit this camp forever; to take with them, if they desire, their personal effects, and to return on pain of instant death. This outlawry includes the woman who claims to own the Rattlesnake Mine. The viper goes with the wolves!"

"Signed for the Council."

"CRIMSON CLINT."

The proclamation was followed by the names of the fifty champions and beneath them all that of Stella was strikingly conspicuous.

"What do you think?" smiled Crimson Clint, when he saw that Gomez had finished reading.

"It's cold-blooded."

"We made it so. A man what can't get away from death in twenty-four hours deserves to die! I'm goin' to plant a pole in the sand on the line to-night, and mornin' will show 'em the decree."

"They won't go."

"Then let 'em fight it out!"

Clint picked up the paper and put it away.

"They say you have influence with the girl," he went on, looking searchingly at his brother Philistine.

"Alas! I have none."

Gomez thought of his unsuccessful mission while he answered.

"She used to listen to you."

"But, not of late—not since we divided."

"She's included in the proclamation. We can't make fish o' one an' fowl o' the other. Philistia must win over all!"

Clint went to the door, but stole a look back at Gomez who looked at the floor in deep thought.

"She won't sell out, eh?" he queried.

"No."

"Then, let her go, or stay with the rest. Peace in Philistia is worth more than a young girl's life!" and the big desperado strode away, leaving Gomez with a troubled countenance and his hands clinched.

"By heavens!" he cried. "If I do die it'll be in a good cause."

CHAPTER V.

THE STORM HOLDS BACK.

WHEN morning came again Crimson Clint, chief of the Philistines, was the first man to look eagerly toward the dead-line.

To his astonishment he saw nothing that resembled the proclamation he had drawn up with the consent of the council.

The pole to which he had attached it was in its place, but the paper had disappeared.

His rage knew no bounds.

He went to the pole and found footprints in the sand, but, whose?

The council came together again, in his cabin. The situation was discussed in all of its phases. Some were for crossing the line and invading the territory of the Champions, others for challenging the whole lot to mortal combat along the line itself. No one was courageous enough to counsel peace.

It was finally agreed, as a compromise, to wait until night, and replace the proclamation with another.

Gomez nodded his acquiescence to this plan. He had not taken a very active part in the council, a fact which did not escape Crimson Clint's notice.

"The girl's eyes are devilish pretty," said the Philistine captain to himself. "And I heard Gomez say once that his favorite color was blue."

The day passed without any disturbance. The very quiet that reigned between the factions resembled the deep lull that precedes a storm. Men eyed each other madly from both sides of the line; but not a foot crossed it.

The night that followed the warm day was dark. A pall of clouds covering the entire sky shut out the stars, burying them in black, as it were.

Crimson Clint performed the same duty he had performed the night before. He affixed to the pole in the sand an exact copy of the stolen proclamation, and then went back to await results.

The next morning, behold! The results of the night before were found repeated!

The document for the second time had disappeared!

"Fire and furies!" cried Clint. "This has to be stopped. We must change our tactics or watch the proclamation all night with revolvers."

The council assembled for the third time. Twenty determined men talked the matter over and agreed to post another and the last warning, and to watch it all night, shooting down without mercy the man who should come to the pole.

Crimson Clint alone in his cabin was rewriting the proclamation with great care.

The sun was sinking once more in the west, and the shadows of the shanties of Sunset were falling long across the sand.

The leader of the Philistines was in the midst of his task when his door was thrown open by an excited man, exclaiming:

"Visitors, captain!"

Clint stopped and waited for more.

"Thar ar' two o' them," continued the Philistine. "One we've seen before; the other is a 'Frisco nabob."

"There's no particular hurry about this," remarked Captain Clint, taking up the half-finished proclamation. "I'll take a look at our guests, Brazos," and he followed the man out into the waning light.

Sure enough, some one had come to Sunset.

In the little square on the Philistine side of the line, stood two horses which gave evidence of hard riding, and near by were their riders.

One of the pair, a dark man with long hair, smiled and reached forth his hand when Crimson Clint came up.

"This gentleman is Colonel Teton, of 'Frisco," he said waving his hand toward his companion, to whom the captain of the Philistines touched his hat, while his searching eyes took him in from head to foot.

"Monte Cristo Teton, eh?" smiled Clint. "I've heard of him."

"They call him that, sometimes," answered the introducer, who was Shasta Sid.

The ice being broken, the Californian nabob

was soon talking pleasantly with Captain Clint; the horses of the pair were put away, and the leader of the Philistines took Teton to his own cabin.

The Monte Cristo of the city said that he had come into the Shasta country for the purpose of investments, and in search of the solution of a certain mystery which would develop as time went by.

Of course Clint knew the man who had come with him. He had been to Sunset before; in fact, there were few places in California where Shasta Sid had not been. But Colonel Teton did not say what was the greatest truth of all—that the dark man was a shadow in his employ—a man whom he had hired to follow a certain trail regardless of cost or danger or results.

The arrival seemed to change the situation in the mountain camp.

Colonel Teton informed the leader of the Philistines that he was not aware of the feud, that he might be able to settle it with his long purse, for it was acknowledged that, with Stella out of the way, the band of Champions would dissolve, and a victory for the Philistines be the final result.

Several days passed without incident. Some mysterious power seemed to keep the factions apart. The proclamation was not posted, and Colonel Teton and Shasta Sid made long excursions into the neighboring country. Sometimes Crimson Clint went along, but they went mostly by themselves.

By and by it became whispered in Philistia that the 'Frisco nabob was thinking about buying Stella out.

But, would the girl sell?

She had declared that her mine should never become the property of the Philistines. She would not break her vow in selling to the Californian, but he might become a Philistine in time, and his appearance might be a Philistine trick.

The Tall Redwood and his companions looked upon Colonel Teton and Shasta Sid with no little distrust. The two men crossed the line at their pleasure, but a week passed before the nabob came in actual contact with Stella.

The young girl encountered him one afternoon near the mouth of the mine. She had seen him at a distance several times, but now they stood face to face with a few tufts of well-trodden grass between them.

The Man from 'Frisco started slightly at finding himself so near the queen of the Rattlesnake, and the color left her face for a moment.

He had no intention, he said, of invading the mine, but Stella soon broke his apologies by inviting him into the place itself. She had nothing to conceal, she remarked; "not even from a Philistine," she added, with a laugh.

A few minutes later Colonel Teton stood with the Star of Shasta in the depths of the famous bonanza.

A brilliant torch revealed the interior of the chamber and showed him the work of Stella's men.

Lighting a smaller torch by the main one she led him from one corridor into another until she came to a sudden halt, and turning upon him, said:

"We are now under Philistia! You see I have extended my shafts into the enemy's territory, so called. This is why they show their teeth, and why twelve men have gone to the little cemetery on the hill within the past six months. But, right is right. My deed calls for all the mining ground I can find, starting from a certain point."

"Your deed, girl?" cried the nabob, in amazement.

"Yes. You shall see it by and by. It is a curious document, whose genuineness Crimson Clint even does not dispute. But they fight us all the same," Stella showed her perfect teeth in a smile.

"How did you come to Sunset?"

"The deed brought me," was the response.

"Did you have it when you came?"

"I did."

"But you did not come alone?"

"No. I brought the Tall Redwood with me, and six others. After awhile more came; Sunset City came into existence, and then the feud began."

"This mine shows proofs of having been worked long before your time."

"It was. The deed—the papers I have—makes mention of this. But, that doesn't lessen my right to it."

Colonel Teton said "no" almost unconsciously.

Bits of rock which he had picked up revealed to his trained eye the wealth of the drift. He knew he had entered a bonanza of fabulous riches, and to think that it belonged to a young girl!

The thought was galling.

"Do you like this life?" he asked Stella as they turned back.

"No," she answered promptly. "I abhor it. I don't like their quarrels. I wish I had never seen the men of Philistia."

"Then, why don't you sell out?"

"To them?" she exclaimed, suddenly drawing back and looking at Colonel Teton with a flash in the depths of the eyes so mild before.

"To the men of the North—to Crimson Clint and his wolves? You know nothing of what I have taken at their hands. They haven't money enough—the whole set put together—and some of them are not beggars by any means, to get my bonanza into their clutches."

"Pardon me," apologized the San Franciscan. "I had no thought of the Philistines when I spoke. Other people may be able to buy you out."

The girl looked steadily at Colonel Teton for a moment.

"What will you give me?" she queried.

The millionaire of 'Frisco tried to keep down the thrill which he felt must be betraying his eagerness to Stella of Sunset.

"Would two hundred thousand buy it?" he asked.

"No."

The man caught breath for another offer.

"Don't tempt me!" suddenly exclaimed the girl.

"Am I getting close to your figures?"

"Let us stop here; let us go back," and without another word Stella conducted him from the mine, and vanished before he could return to the subject.

CHAPTER VI.

GOLD GOMEZ'S RIDE.

COLONEL TETON looked after Stella of Sunset and laughed.

"I must have touched her price," said he to himself. "Another raise and she would have surrendered. The next time I'll fetch her!" And he followed slowly, going back to the camp and soon afterward appearing on the Square.

He had not gone far from the mouth of the mine when a human head appeared above a boulder, and a pair of sharp eyes followed him until he was no longer seen. After awhile a brace of shoulders appeared where the head had been and the figure of a man straightening above the rock revealed the figure of Gold Gomez.

This man must have heard the nabob's offer for Stella's mine, the girl's answer, and witnessed her flight.

"A mine hunt, is it?" he exclaimed. "I begin to see through your scheme, Colonel Teton. Shasta Sid was in these parts a few days ago. He now comes back with you. Has he been to 'Frisco? Is the dark man in your employ? I don't have to tell the council what I've seen and heard. I'll be a council unto myself."

Gold Gomez disappeared with more rapidity than Monte Cristo Teton had gotten out of sight.

Instead of going into camp he stole round it and dodged among a lot of rocks into what seemed the mouth of a cavern.

Less than ten minutes later a man came forth leading a horse. The face of the man was covered by a mask of dark goods which fitted closely. From his head down he looked like Gomez, but the mask made a mystery of him.

He flung himself into the saddle when he had led the horse clear of the rocks. In another moment he was riding away, headed toward the south, and the horse, sure-footed and eager, went past rock and tree like a meteor.

An hour passed and Gold Gomez was still in the saddle. He had left the rough country round about Sunset City far behind, and now let his steed bear him leisurely across a little basin marked here and there by clumps of small trees and bushes.

At the further side of the basin Gomez found a collection of cabins similar to those that made up his own town, though not so numerous.

He entered the camp without much noise. The place appeared asleep.

In front of the last house but one the second captain of the Philistines drew rein and slipped from the saddle. He let his horse stand loose while he went toward the door and listened.

"There's death here, from the stillness," grinned Gold Gomez to himself.

Then he raised his hand to rap on the door, but before his yellowish knuckles could touch it, the portal opened, and the Californian found himself face to face with a woman, who was revealed by a lamp on a shelf at one side of the room.

"I heard you, and I knew your step," smiled the person beyond the door. "Come in, Captain Gomez."

Gold Gomez obeyed, almost before the voice had ceased.

The woman was forty, if a day, but she had lost little, if any, of a beauty which must have been famous at one time.

In stature she was rather tall, her figure was willowy and graceful, but her eyes were the striking feature about her.

They were as black as the hair that touched Gomez's shoulders, and they shone like the ring that glistened on his hand.

The man from Sunset removed the mask when the woman had closed the door.

"Something important brings you down from above," she began, watching him with an eagerness she did not attempt to conceal.

"Something important," repeated Gomez.

"How many more of you have died in your boots since I saw you last?"

"Not one."

"Come, come, Gomez; this will never do," laughed the woman. "What has come over the wildcats of Shasta? Who has been preaching the gospel of peace up there? Has Crimson Clint turned peacemaker?"

To all this Gomez good-naturedly shook his head.

"We've been showing our teeth all along," he replied. "We were just getting at it in deal earnest, when something occurred. In order to show you how peaceful we were, you have but to read this."

He drew from his bosom a paper, which, when unfolded, turned out to be a proclamation signed by Crimson Clint, chief of the Philistines, and warning Stella and her Champions not to remain twenty-four hours in Sunset City on pain of death.

It was one of the mysteriously-stolen warnings.

He watched the woman read the document with a curious smile.

"Why didn't Crimson Clint and the council carry out the threat?" asked the woman.

"The unlooked-for happened and stopped proceedings."

"What was that?"

"The man called Shasta Sid—the mountain shadow—came back; but he was not alone."

"Not alone!" echoed the other.

"No. He brought with him the last man looked for."

"From 'Frisco?"

"Yes."

The dark orbs seemed to get a brighter gleam.

"You need not speak his name—or the name by which he is known," she said. "So, he's been lured from his Eden? So he has come to Sunset to grasp one more fortune, and to play among the shadows of Shasta a hand as deep, as cool as any he ever played."

Gomez made no reply. Having fallen back he was watching the play of light and shadow on the woman's face while she spoke.

"How does he look?" she suddenly continued, her body bending forward and one of her hands moving across the table like the head of a serpent.

"He's a fine looking man."

"Bearded?"

"To the eyes!"

"Looks as if the world used him well?"

"Yes."

"He's got enough to make it do so!" exclaimed she. "And so, Shasta Sid has fetched him to Sunset?"

"They rode in together, at any rate."

"The spy went after his master. He thought the plum was ripe. Well, it is!"

There was an emphasis to the last sentence which caught and held Gomez's attention again.

The man from Sunset thought a moment and mentioned the very hour of Colonel Teton's appearance in camp.

"And what has he been doing all this time?" inquired the woman eagerly. "Hasn't he played any cards yet?"

"He threw down one to-night."

"Ah!"

"He offered Stella two hundred thousand for the mine."

"And Stella—"

"Refused, but told him not to tempt her."

"As if she would sell if offered enough, eh?"

"It looks that way to me."

"What! were you a witness?"

"I was."

The woman rose slowly before the upturned face of Gomez.

He saw her figure straighten until the glowing eyes were shining above him like two stars.

"You must take a message to the girl," said she slowly.

"From you?" asked Gomez in a voice of amazement.

"From me!"

"I thought—"

"There! no matter what you thought!" was the interruption, stern enough to quiet a person even of his nerve. "You will take it?"

"I will."

The woman crossed the room and took from beneath the pillow of a cot in one corner a piece of red wax and a small sheet of paper.

Gomez took some tobacco from a buckskin pouch and rolled himself a cigarette while his companion prepared to write. He watched her through his smoke rings with mingled awe and curiosity; he seemed to smile at the play of the neat but dangerous-looking hand across the paper, and he must have wondered what she was writing with so much care.

She almost covered the paper with feminine chirography, and when she had read it in silence she folded it so that the four corners met on the back. Then she dropped some melted wax upon the spot and pressed the serpent head of a gold ring upon it while yet warm.

Gomez watched these proceedings with pardonable interest.

"You will take that back with you," said she, tossing the sealed message across the table.

"You will place it in her hands."

Gomez looked at the letter a second and then

conveyed it to an inner pocket which had a flap which his fingers buttoned.

"She might sell," she went on. "Stella might take Monte Cristo Teton at his offer. After she reads that she will not. Will Crimson Clint repeat his proclamation?"

"Not unless Colonel Teton asks it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the biggest Philistine of us all has surrendered!" he laughed.

"That he is already cheek by jowl with the nabob from 'Frisco?"

"Yes."

"A willing fly, eh, Captain Gomez?"

The smoker smiled and nodded.

"It's a holy alliance! By my soul, a beautiful pair!" came across the table, a set of pearly teeth gleaming for a moment in the light. "I don't want to hurry you off, Gomez; but I know your horse. A brief rest refreshes him. The girl might be seen soon. The 'Frisco shark may follow up his first attack. If she should yield—if the big bonanza should fall into his hands—But I can't think of this! Go! Gomez; go! At the end of the game you shall be paid a thousand fold. There is but one Gomez under the sun and he is my friend."

The young man bowed and touched his hat as his figure resumed its usual pose.

She put forth her hand; he seized it and raised it to his lips; then dashing it down, he wheeled and darted from the house.

The next moment the sound of hoofs awoke the echoes of the little camp, and Gold Gomez was riding back with a message which was to work wonders.

He rode into Sunset City at the witching hour of midnight. He slid from the saddle, and was hurrying toward Stella's house when a voice halted him and his arm was clutched.

It was Crimson Clint.

"Good news, Captain Gomez! The viper goes at last. The Rattlesnake has changed hands."

"My God!" cried Gomez, falling back.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THUNDERBOLT.

"WHAT!" flashed instantly through the night-rider's mind, "have I arrived too late to balk Monte Cristo Teton?"

Gomez's exclamation, drawn out by Clint's announcement, fixed the eyes of that worthy upon him.

"The deal is so nearly consummated that the girl can't back out," continued the leader of the Philistines. "With her will go the Tall Redwood and his gang, and Sunset will begin a new era of prosperity."

Gomez said he hoped it would; in fact, he was tired of the feud which had arrayed man against man. But, what was the price paid or to be paid by the 'Frisco Croesus?

"Colonel Teton raised his first offer to three hundred thousand," answered Crimson Clint. "Every mine-owner has his or her price, and Teton touched hers when he named that sum."

The two captains separated as soon as Gomez could bring a separation about.

The young Philistine was anxious to confront Stella. The message in his bosom seemed to be burning a hole in his flesh.

A few minutes afterward a figure crossed the divide and rapped gently at the girl's door.

In a moment a voice replied, and after a short interval Gomez was admitted to confront Stella, whose eyes were dilated with wonder.

"They say that you've sold out," were the first words of the impatient Philistine.

The girl seemed staggered. Her color went and came in the light of her little lamp.

"Who said so?" she asked.

"Captain Clint. Is it true?"

"I have promised—"

"To transfer your deeds to him? But they are still yours, eh?" interrupted Gomez, brightening.

"They are still mine."

"Thank Heaven!"

The hand of Gomez seemed to leap to his bosom. He extended the missive. She went to the lamp, and, bending forward, broke the red seal, and began to devour the contents of the letter eagerly.

"Did she give you this, Captain Gomez?" she asked, looking up from the paper.

"Yes," said the Philistine.

The girl folded the letter and covered it with her hand.

"I thank you. You've turned the tide," she replied.

"Then you won't sell the Rattlesnake?"

"Not now, if at all."

"They'll accuse you of double dealing."

"Who will?" cried Stella, with almost blazing eyes.

"Monte Cristo Teton and Captain Clint."

"I shall not care," smiled the girl. "The one I have heard talk before; the other can go back to his 'Frisco ducats. He can't win here!"

"Have you any message for her?" asked Gold Gomez.

"Are you going back?"

"I may."

"Say that I still hold the bonanza, that my grip is as strong as ever, and that now no hand shall shake it loose!"

Gomez bowed.

A minute later he had said good-night to Stells, though it was nearly morning, and once more he stood beneath the mountain stars.

If he had thought of spies he might have seen the dark figure that vanished around the corner of Stella's cabin as he came forth, but he saw nothing.

The possessor of this figure had witnessed the interview under the girl's roof; he had heard every word of the conversation; his keen black eyes had not missed a single gesture.

The spy was Shasta Sid, Monte Cristo Teton's detective; and his countenance more than once, while he was at work, told that he was scoring a victory of some kind.

Gold Gomez was permitted to go away unmolested. He went to his own shanty and disappeared beyond the door.

Shasta Sid turned back and left him there.

Early the next morning a thunderbolt fell unexpectedly in a certain quarter of the Shasta camp.

It took Colonel Teton's breath. His face got white and scarlet several times by turns before he could give vent to his feelings.

"This is somebody's work!" cried he. "Some enemy has interfered. I had the bargain made. The golden plum was about to drop into my lap. I expected to shake it down to-day, but now it seems further away than ever. Who did this? Whose hand has come into the game? Teton Sau's? No, I won't believe that. It can't be Leone's, either!"

The cause of his ravings was a short note from Stella which even then lay on his table. It contained but five words, but they were enough.

"I won't sell the Rattlesnake. STELLA."

He had read them a dozen times, though the first reading had burned them into his brain, as it were.

Presently he went into Crimson Clint's cabin.

He threw the note before the captain of the Philistines, and smiled grimly while that person read it.

"Interfered with, ha!" cried Crimson Clint, tigerishly showing his teeth.

"It seems so," and the 'Frisco Croesus leaned forward white-faced and with satanic look.

"Can you name the meddler?" he went on. "Can you spot the hand that has come between? One half of my fortune to the person who points out the spoiler of my trade!"

Crimson Clint smiled.

"Can't you guess?" queried the Philistine. "Some enemy of yours may be at work. The girl was fixed in her resolve last night, wasn't she?"

"Yes; I was to have had the deeds to-day. Now get them if you can!"

"There's something strange about this," rejoined Crimson Clint.

"Something dark, too," broke forth the nabob.

"You have enemies?"

"Where is the man who has none?"

"True. I wouldn't give a dollar for such a person. But some enemies are devilish provoking. They turn up just when one doesn't want them."

"Always then," seemed to come through Colonel Teton's teeth.

"I don't want to look into your late past," continued Clint, to the camp's guest.

"That is no business of mine, but if you can lay your hand on some old foe—some person who at one time may have sworn revenge for an insult real or fancied—you will have found the meddler. For the Tall Redwood and his men would not have objected to the sale. We have outmastered the Champions, and nothing but the girl's will and leadership have held them together until now."

Colonel Teton reflected for a moment.

"One of my enemies has just handed in his life-checks," said he, "therefore, the hand which has come between is not his. Another foe is far away and could not reach me here; the blind one—a woman—"

"Ha! a woman in the case!" laughed Crimson Clint.

"No, pardon me—a tigress!" corrected the 'Frisco nabob. "This woman," continued he, "is capable of doing anything. My trail-hound has failed to find her; but now he has something to work on. I will put him on the trail at once. He must find her; then he can turn her over to me. I'll be responsible for the rest."

"Where was she heard of last?"

"Five years ago."

"Did she do you an injury then?"

"No; she merely left a note on my table—a note containing a boast and a threat."

"And vanished?"

"And vanished. But I shall win the play thus interrupted by an unseen hand. I will have, inside of three days, the deeds of the Rattlesnake Mine. When Monte Cristo Teton, as they call him, fails to take the stakes, Shasta will go to the sea."

The man laughed over his boast until his eyes sparkled maliciously and with triumph.

Crimson Clint saw him quit his cabin and going to the little window alongside of the door

he watched him until he could see him no longer.

"I think I know whose hand was in this little game," muttered the captain of the Philistines.

"More than once of late I have seen signs that point to treason in camp. Cupid has been playing his cards on the sly, he has thrown his net over a certain head in Sunset, and while Monte Cristo Teton sets his trail dog, Shasta Sid, on the suspected woman's track, I will look after the double-dealer and smite him with a swift and heavy hand."

Captain Clint followed Colonel Teton into the open air.

The 'Frisco nabob had already disappeared.

The Philistine captain walked to a spot near the dead line and looked across upon the cabins there.

He had drawn his figure to its true height and with his arms folded upon his chest made a striking picture in the clear morning light.

Suddenly he caught sight of a figure that emerged from the very cabin which he had singled out from among the lot, and a curious smile crossed his face.

Stella—the figure was the girl's—seemed to see the bronzed statue on the sand the moment she left her abode.

Not more than twenty yards separated the pair.

Stella regarded Crimson Clint for a few seconds, when, called by his look, she came toward the line.

Since it had been drawn in the sand she had never crossed it, but now she seemed on the eve of setting her foot on the other side.

Crimson Clint watched her like a hawk; his eye counted every step.

She came on with her look fixed upon him. There seemed to be a smile at the corners of her mouth.

In a minute Stella of Sunset had reached the mark.

Setting one dainty foot upon the line itself, she said in a voice of silvery sweetness:

"Good-morning, Captain Clint."

The leader of the Philistines started as if she had flashed a revolver in his face, and then, having accomplished her purpose, she turned away, leaving the mountain tough to bite his lips in chagrin.

"Wait!" he growled. "I'll get even!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RATTLESNAKE'S HEART.

SHASTA SID was not long in getting orders from Monte Cristo Teton.

The sun was not yet high when the 'Frisco nabob told him to ferret out the person who had come between him and the Shasta bonanza.

The mountain detective had already reached a conclusion from what he had seen and heard.

He believed that the baffling hand was a woman's. The overheard conversation between Stella and Gold Gomez had confirmed him in this belief, and he thought, too, that she was no per on lightly matched.

Was Gold Gomez in her employ? Was the second captain of the Philistines a traitor?

Shasta Sid went to work at once.

He knew that relations of the most cordial nature had already been entered into by Crimson Clint and Colonel Teton.

The Philistine chief was willing that the 'Frisco Croesus should set up as a nabob in Sunset City, that the famous bonanza so long held by Stella against them all should pass into his hands, and that he should increase his vast wealth to the final ruin of Philistia itself.

Perhaps Captain Clint was willing to get rid of the girl by any means. With her would depart the Tall Redwood and his friends, and Sunset would lose its old feud and its dead line. But a new domination would take the place of all this; the iron hand of Colonel Teton would be uppermost and finally thrust him (Crimson Clint) out of power. Still he played for the present as if willing to meet the future when it came.

The mine queen, after paying her respects to the captain of the Philistines, went not back to her house, but to the mine itself.

She crossed the threshold of the outer chamber.

She passed to a small door which she unlocked, and entered an apartment which was known as her mine office.

If she had listened she might have heard the faint sounds of miners' picks. Her men were at work.

Far away under the very foundations of Philistia a score of half-naked men were making her richer than ever. Above them all towered the giant figure of the Tall Redwood, his face begrimed with the dirt of the mine, and his eyes as bright as diamonds behind it.

Stella took down an iron box which she kept on a shelf and opened it.

She brought to light several old-looking papers that resembled parchment. These she opened before the little desk which the room contained, and looked at them for some time.

"Three hundred thousand for these!" smiled the girl. "It is a great sum. I could go to San Francisco and be somebody there. I could cross the continent and become a sensation in

the great Atlantic cities. But who would I be? What would I call myself? Ay, there is the puzzle. I am 'Stella.' I have no other name. I don't know who I am. Only Stella! I was on the point of yielding. The great sum and this dark feud confused me. In a moment I thought of peace. But why quit the heart of Shasta Land? I would become lost elsewhere. On what little things our lives turn! This turned the scale! this bit of paper outweighed all these heavy old folds."

She had taken the strange woman's message from her bosom and dropped it upon the deeds of the Rattlesnake bonanza.

"I'll bury them together!" she went on, and the next moment she had placed the little message in one of the larger papers. "They won't find it here without my key, and I guard that with vigilance. Will he go back empty-handed? Not if he can play a better card. I think I can read Monte Cristo Teton. He and Crimson Clint have joined hands. The captain of the Philistines must have known the 'Frisco Croesus before to-day."

The box was locked and restored to the shelf. Stella looked at it for a few seconds, and then went away, fastening the door after her.

She now heard the voice of the miners at work.

"It can't last always!" exclaimed the girl while she listened in one of the gloomy passages. "A change will come, it must. The tiger has drawn off for breath; that's all. The storm has lulled."

She did not take the corridor which would have led her into the chamber where the Tall Redwood and his fellow-miners were adding to her wealth. She passed to their right, guiding herself by the touch of her fingers along the wall. At length she seemed to be ascending toward the surface of the earth, and the way became so narrow that she could with difficulty keep on.

The Star of Shasta kept on until the dark way suddenly ended. She could touch the sides of the place with her elbows, and the unseen ceiling was dangerously low.

Stella had reached what might be termed a "whispering gallery."

In a moment she was listening to a lot of voices. They were strangely mixed at first, but she was soon able to separate them.

The girl leaned against one of the walls and listened, with a smile on her face which no one saw.

"A listener never hears anything good of herself," she murmured. "My ears don't tingle, though. I'm used to this."

What she heard was a heated discussion by the Philistines of Sunset. It was hard to tell from the sounds whether the speakers were above or beyond the echoing passage.

"She had it sold and then backed out!" said one of the voices.

"He might have known that," was the gruff retort. "The girl seeks exile. She wants to be driven out with her Champions."

"Some one came between! Captain Clint says so."

"Ah! that puts another face on the matter." This man Stella had not heard before.

"Whose hand, I'd like to know?"

There was a moment of silence.

"The golden gray-beard has a secret foe."

"The old story when things don't go right," laughed a coarse voice. "What does he want here, anyhow?"

"More wealth."

"Talk about meddlers, that man is one!"

"But he is Captain Clint's friend, and we stand by him."

"We swear by Captain Clint!" said a dozen voices in unison.

The growler seemed to have been hushed up by these expressions of fealty at any rate, Stella did not hear from him again for some time.

She listened to the unseen council until it broke up.

Every word came to her with wonderful distinctness; she did not lose one during the whole time.

"As precious a set of Philistines as ever came together," she laughed. "I know them all. They have been under the thumb of Captain Clint ever since the opening of the war against me and mine. But now there are signs of a rebellion. Some don't like Monte Cristo Teton's coming. They see in him a new rod of iron. We will see how it comes out."

There being silence in the whispering gallery, the girl-miner went back down the narrow passage and stood at last where the way was wider, and where she could touch neither walls nor ceiling.

Moving on again she paused at a certain point and looked down upon an exciting scene.

In a weirdly lighted chamber twenty men were at work.

They looked like demons toiling in some subterranean pit, all hatless and many naked to the waist. A powerful quartz-mill was crushing pieces of rock which a Titan was throwing into its rough hopper, and a man whose physique was power itself was overseeing the whole work.

Stella continued to gaze upon this scene for some time as if it had a weird fascination for her.

She was wholly unseen by the toilers. All at once the overseer came her way.

The girl drew back and waited. He left the mine and disappeared, but a moment later Stella threw out a hand and caught a sleeve.

"You, Stella?" exclaimed a voice as if the touch had disclosed her identity. "I've been wishing you'd come. I was just going to the office to see if you might not be there, but here you are for the Tall Redwood!"

"We'll go to the office," said the Star of Shasta, and the two, talking but little, passed down the corridors to the small room near the entrance where the girl lit a lamp and then looked at the big Champion of her cause.

The Tall Redwood almost touched the top of the chamber.

He could literally look down upon the woman he served.

"Why didn't you take his money?" asked the man, a strange smile visible on his face in spite of the mask of mine dirt there.

"What do I want with it?"

"It's already mined," was the quick reply.

"It is in cold cash."

"Yes."

"It is a big sum, besides," continued the Tall Redwood. "They say you had the bargain made when—"

"When what?" queried Stella as the man paused.

"When somebody stepped between?" blurted the Tall Redwood.

"Do they say this?"

"Yes."

"What do you think, Captain Redwood?"

"I swan I don't know what to think."

"I had almost yielded," said Stella, frankly. "I will go further and say that if a certain event had not transpired I might not be owner of the Rattlesnake at this hour."

The tall man locked most curiously at Stella of Sunset.

"What would you have done with the money if you had sold?" he inquired.

"I would have divided it equally among you all and dismissed you with my blessing."

"But you?"

"The world is wide, Captain Redwood," smiled Stella. "It is a long distance from sea to sea."

"What would you have called yourself?"

The girl miner started. A short time before she had thought of this very thing.

"I should not have wanted for a name," she replied. "I could have taken yours, perhaps."

"Stella Redwood, eh? Ha, ha!" he laughed.

"But you won't sell, will you?"

"Do you want the sale to proceed?"

"With that man—with that ducat devil from 'Frisco? A thousand times, no! The hand that interfered—if one did, mind you, isn't an enemy of ours. I want you to hold back. He will play another card presently. A dangerous leaven is working among the Philistines. Some of them see a new yoke in the person of Monte Cristo Teton. Besides, the girl I saw in the mountain to-day—"

"In the mountain?" broke in Stella. "A girl there?"

"Yes. She was on horseback, riding slowly down Echo Canyon, and I saw her a long time."

"Who is she?"

"I don't know; but my opinion is that she wouldn't be here if the gold shark had not come."

CHAPTER IX.

SHASTA SCORES A POINT.

WATCHING his opportunity, Gold Gomez slipped from Sunset City and made his way to the mountain stable from which he has already been seen to lead a horse.

In a short time, with the setting sun at his back, he was riding toward the little camp in the basin, where a few hours previously, he had an interview with the strange woman.

Looking down from one of the elevated trails that commanded a view of the region south of Sunset, stood a man who sat bolt upright in the saddle of a handsome horse.

He saw the Philistine as he passed over the trail and watched him until he reached a certain point, when he clapped spurs to his own steed and disappeared.

Shasta Sid was carrying out orders; the mountain ferret was obeying the man in whose employ he was; and to follow Gold Gomez might be to find the person who had sent the meddlesome message to Stella.

Gomez may have thought of the dark-faced detective, but he did not look for him in a play of this sort. He kept on putting mile after mile behind him, now lost to his pursuer's eye, but now seen again as the country changed.

This chase was kept up until Shasta Sid, drawing rein on a certain spot, looked far below his position and saw a small dark object moving across a small valley toward a cluster of shanties at one edge of it.

He knew that Gold Gomez was in the saddle beneath the lofty trail, that he had followed him

from Sunset with the certainty of the hawk, and he believed that handsome Philistine was approaching his destination.

By this time the sun, not very high when the chase began, had dropped out of sight, and Shasta Sid losing Gold Gomez among the cabins resumed his trail.

He edged around the valley until he found himself in some dense timber near the camp, then, tying his horse, he waited until night cast everything in shadow.

"Something ought to come of this ride," murmured the California detective. "Gold Gomez has come back to the sender of the message. That message stopped the bargain between Stella and Colonel Teton. Who sent it? That's what I want to know."

Shasta Sid stood among the cabins, his keen eyes on the alert.

Gold Gomez might go back if he wanted to; he did not care.

All at once there appeared in the door of a house between him and a lamp which illuminated the rude small room the figure of a woman.

The sudden discovery nearly took Shasta Sid's breath.

He saw that the woman's figure was graceful and tall, that her head was well poised and, thanks to the light, that she was handsome though rather dark like himself.

For five minutes or more Monte Cristo Teton's spy watched her with a thousand speculations chasing each other through his brain.

What had become of Gold Gomez? Had he gone back after acquainting her with the success of her interference? Certainly he was not near, for everything indicated that the woman was alone.

She shut the door and disappeared as suddenly as she had come into sight.

Shasta Sid went forward.

Gliding up to the cabin he leaned against the rough logs and looked inside.

He saw her again standing in the middle of the room with an unmistakable smile of victory on her face.

"The caldron has only begun to simmer. Wait till it boils!" he heard her laugh. "I've balked the 'Frisco Midas with the poorest card in my hand. What won't I do with the best ones?"

Shasta Sid drew back. The woman had turned suddenly toward the door and he did not want to be seen.

There were no doubts in his mind now.

He had found Teton's enemy, had discovered Lady Leone as he called her.

Shasta Sid found at the other end of the camp a shanty from which, by way of a door which stood wide open, came the loud voices of a lot of revelers. He approached and counted the men, six in number, big fellows in long hair and wide-brimmed hats, with the ends of their trowsers lost in the tops of their boots, and wearing the pistoled belts of the day.

After a short inspection of the group the mountain shadow went boldly forward and entered. The lamp hanging above the rude counter at one end of the room immediately brought his figure into full view and in a second he had every eye upon him.

"Walk up, pard," exclaimed one of the six, "we war jes' goin' to poison ourselves," and as Shasta Sid came forward the seventh glass was placed on the counter by the man behind it.

"Every body's welcome ter Harmony Holler," continued the same individual. "Thar's no exclusiveness hyer, an' we ask no questions. We ar' the Drones o' Harmony; we kin eat more honey than other bees make than any other insects o' the hive. An' we thrive on it, too, don't we?" and the speaker laughed as his big hand fell upon Shasta Sid's shoulder and rested there for a moment.

In a little while the mountain shadow seemed to be as well acquainted with the Drones as though he had known them for years.

He did not ask after the woman at the other end of the camp, and the Drones did not mention her. To them he was a rolling stone, bound, for the present, for San Francisco; but he was likely to quit the city in a short time for another term of rough life among the hills. He politely declined a dozen offers of citizenship in Harmony Hollow.

The men said the adjacent hills were full of gold, but they didn't need it for their comfort, and they did not intend to work so long as riotous idleness did not interfere with their existence.

"We've got a queen bee," said one of the gang, at last. "You ought to stay long enough to see her."

"Ab'l" smiled Shasta Sid.

"She's a good one, too! We ask no questions, as I've said, an' thar's none o' us what knows any more about her than you do."

Shasta Sid thought that a singular way of running a town; they might get bad citizens in that way; a little inquiry would enable them to—

A big brown hand stopped him right here.

"You don't think we'd inquire after a woman's antecedents, eh?" queried the main spokesman of the Drones. "That would hardly be chivalrous. She came hyar some months ago,

and settled down quietly. Calls herself Manon, the Exile; says she's tired o' civilized society; seems ter enjoy life in the hive, and we says nothin'."

"Is she pretty?" inquired Shasta Sid.

"Sorter so," was the answer. "She's been prettier in her day, because she's been younger. Want ter see her, eh?"

"I'm not particular."

Colonel Teton's man did not cross the step of the den until the hour of midnight was not far off. He had exchanged certain looks, off and on, with the youngest of the group, a man of thirty, with a rather handsome countenance, and the best-dressed one of the lot.

Shasta Sid bade the Drones good-by with a good deal of effusiveness. He could not think of remaining all night; indeed, night was his best time for travel, and his horse could see the trail under the stars as well as under the sun.

He shook hands all around before he got away from the jolly Drones of Harmony Hollow. He felt his hands pressed significantly by the youngest member, and their eyes met for a moment ere their fingers fell apart.

Shasta Sid passed Manon's cabin on his way to the timber where he had left his horse.

A faint light pervaded the place which was as still as a grave, and the millionaire's shadow did not investigate.

When near the dark line of the timber he heard a quick step behind him.

"I thought so," muttered Shasta Sid, stopping suddenly, and the following moment a human figure came forward.

"I got away from 'em, cap'n," said a voice, and the detective found himself face to face with the youngest Drone.

"Come into the timber," said Shasta Sid, drawing the man after him, and the two walked to where the horse was.

The starlight did but little to relieve the gloom of the scene. The tall, spectral figures of the trees surrounded them, and it was only by standing close together that they could see one another.

"I know something about Manon the Exile," said the man. "I've found out a little, principally because I couldn't help it; and then, by Jove, the woman excited my curiosity. I am Tulare Tom, an' the moment I set eyes on Manon I knew I had seen her before—years ago—with Teton Sam."

Shasta Sid started in the dark.

"What became of Teton Sam?" he queried, eagerly.

"Died with his boots on."

"When?"

"Last summer."

"Where?"

"On the Death Stretch, south o' Tucson."

"Who did it?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if Manon could give you some information if she would," was the laughing response.

"Why Manon?"

"She was in the country at the time."

"With him?"

"Yes."

"When did she come to Harmony Hollow?"

Shasta Sid's companion thought a moment.

"About six months ago."

"What does she do?"

"Nothing."

"Owns no mines?"

"No."

"What is she here for?"

"She's biding her time."

"Biding it for what?"

"For vengeance. A square look at her will show you the devil in her eye. Manon, the Exile! That's only a name for Harmony Holler. Last week I saw her making marks in the dust of one of the trails with a stick. She turned suddenly and walked away, and I went to where she had stood. What do you think I found there?"

"A name in the dust, eh?"

"Exactly that, and it wasn't the word 'Manon,' either. It was a singular name for these parts—one I had never heard before, and I found myself looking at it with a great deal of curiosity. There in the yellowish dust, written by the delicate stick which Manon had been holding, I saw the name 'Leone.'

"Nothing else?" asked Shasta Sid.

"Nothing else."

Monte Cristo Teton's detective was silent, but his countenance would have been a revelation to Tulare Tom if he could have seen it.

Shasta Sid had scored a point.

CHAPTER X.

A HOT TRIGGER.

COLONEL TETON, beaten at his first play, was by no means baffled.

He had not come up from San Francisco to get his hands on a new bonanza to be defeated by a young girl; not while he had Crimson Clint for his friend and Shasta Sid for his ferret.

It was with a good deal of impatience that he waited for the detective's return.

As yet he had not seen Gold Gomez's hand in the game, but Captain Clint had not been so short-sighted.

Gomez stole back into Sunset City apparently unperceived.

Apparently we say, but the keenest of eyes were on the watch and they saw him return.

"I thought so," muttered the owner of these orbs. "The men of Philistia will have to weed a little treason from their garden," and he walked from his post of duty with a last glance at the cabin beyond whose door Gold Gomez had disappeared.

The Captain of the Philistines went not to his own abode nor to the "hotel" where Colonel Teton had established himself.

He looked across the line at the quiet cabins of the Champions, and for a few seconds seemed on the eve of stalking beyond it.

"Captain?"

He turned half around and found himself addressed by a man who was the youngest member of the band.

"What is it, Theo?"

The young person—he was young compared with his associates—came forward, and looked straight into Crimson Clint's eyes.

"Not here," he answered.

"Then you have something to say?"

"I have a word or two."

"Important, Theo?"

"I think so."

Captain Crimson said: "Come, then," and conducted Theo to his own house, beyond the door of which he turned suddenly upon him.

"The men are talking, Captain Clint," began the young Philistine, who in the light looked handsome with his clear black eyes, jet mustache and faultless figure.

"They are, eh?" rejoined Crimson Clint, his eye suddenly showing indignation. "What are they talking about?"

"They don't like the way some things have turned out lately."

The chief of the Philistines stepped back and haughtily looked Theo over from head to foot.

"Did they send you to me?" he exclaimed.

"No."

"Are you sure of it?"

"I am."

"Then, go on."

Captain Clint folded his arms and waited for Theo to proceed.

"You will pardon my bluntness, captain," he went on. "I believe in dealing fair with you. The men don't like this 'Frisco Midas."

"Why don't they like him?" cried Captain Clint.

"First, because his very attempt to buy the mine shows that he came to Shasta to enrich himself, and next because they don't want him mixed up in their affairs."

The captain of the Philistines at first seemed inclined to burst into a derisive laugh, but he spared his companion's feelings.

"Do they see new domination in Colonel Teton's success?" he asked.

"They do."

"Is this feeling general?"

"It is widespread."

"Who started it?"

Theo made no answer.

"Is the witness afraid of criminating himself?" queried Crimson Clint.

"He is not," replied the young Philistine, with a slight start and the loss of some color.

"Then, why not tell me?"

"I have said that the feeling spoken of is widespread."

"That is not enough!" exclaimed the chief of the brotherhood, sinking the nails of his boot-heel into the floor. "I want the names of the malcontents. I must know who the growlers are."

Theo was silent.

"You won't tell me, will you?" continued Crimson Clint. "You come to me with the whisperings of a conspiracy, yet you want to keep me in the dark."

"There is no talk against you, captain."

"But it is against my friend and guest, Colonel Teton."

"Then he really is that?"

"He is! What do they threaten to do in case he buys the mine?"

"I cannot speak for them."

"Will they go over to the Champions?"

"They'll never do that."

"Will they quit Sunset?"

"That's more likely."

A troubled cloud was seen to pass over the head Philistine's face.

"Where are they?"

"In their cabins."

He had taken a step toward the door, but he came back at Theo's answer, and for another moment looked searchingly at the young man.

"Tell them—"

He hesitated.

"Tell them that the mine is soon to pass from the girl's hands. Say to them that it is likely to fall into Colonel Teton's possession, and—"

He paused again, like a man reluctant to issue his ultimatum against those whose friendship he has enjoyed.

"And tell them, Theo, that I can't go back on

the man from 'Frisco. Come what may, I stand with Colonel Teton. I am compelled to."

A shade of sadness came to Theo's face and seemed to settle there.

"I'm sorry," he said frankly.

"Then you are with the growlers?"

"I am against the 'Frisco Midas."

"Why you, Theo?"

"I wanted no one to come between us. We have fought our own battles thus far. Monte Cristo Teton will brush us aside and transplant from some of his other bonanzas—it is known that he has them—men who will drive us out. His purchase of the girl's mine means a yoke, or flight. The yoke Philistia will not submit to. We don't want a Midas of that sort among us."

"But the girl has refused to sell?"

"She can't hold out," was the quick retort. "They say he fails at nothing. He comes among us with unlimited wealth at his command, and with a spy—a trail-hound—to make clear all that may be mysterious. This man overthrows the brotherhood of Sunset."

Crimson Clint heard the young Philistine through without an interruption.

"I think I can put my finger on the disturber," said he. "I am still the chosen captain of the Philistines. I am going to rule here or go down before the mutineers."

"There is no mutiny."

"But it is almost that. Colonel Teton stays! If he can get hold of the mine, he will do so. The girl's title, as we all know, really amounts to nothing. She has refused to divulge where she obtained her deeds, or who gave her the secret by which she located the bonanza."

"I am not here to discuss that," answered Theo mildly.

"To warn me, then?"

"To say what I have said."

"I thank you, Theo. Were I to pick an enemy from among the Philistines I would not pick you."

The young man's eyes brightened for a moment; he took the hand which Crimson Clint extended, but dropped it in a second and went toward the door.

"If they knew why—"

The captain of the Philistines suddenly stopped.

"No, I'll tell them nothing," he went on.

"But I am with Monte Cristo Teton. If it be war with Philistia, war must come; but by the eternal hills! I will not, for the privilege of ruling where I have long been master, desert my guest from the South."

There was something almost awful in the mien of the man who stood in the center of the room with his eyes set ablaze, as it were, by the passion of the moment. Theo had never seen him in a rage before, though he had seen him defy the united Champions with one foot on the dead-line in the sand.

He opened the door and looked back at the Philistine as if waiting for—he hardly knew what—before passing out.

"Tell them my decision," said Crimson Clint.

"If it makes traitors of them all, well and good. I can't desert Monte Cristo Teton. If they understood why—Go, Theo! Philistia won't want for a head though all of you turn from your allegiance."

The young man with another look crossed the step.

As he did so, he nearly ran against a figure which, coming up at that moment, did not catch his eye until then.

He fell back from the new-comer with an exclamation of astonishment, for the light had shown him the now-familiar figure of Colonel Teton.

Theo had no color in his face.

"I say it to him, captain," he cried, glancing at Crimson Clint, already at the door, though covering the startled nabob with his finger. "I say that we didn't ask him to Sunset. One master is enough. We will obey one; we'll rebel with two!"

"Enough!"

Crimson Clint was across the threshold. A mad bound took him over the space that stretched between him and Theo. His hands were in front of him; his eyes had the light of a tiger's.

"Then I'll commence here!" cried the enraged man. "Wherever I find mutiny I'll meet it, and suppress it, or quit Philistia forever!"

Theo had thrown up his hands, not to struggle with his chief, but to protect himself.

He was thrown several feet back by Crimson Clint's rush, and, suddenly disengaging himself from the mountain lion, he walked away.

"Not with a whole skin!" he heard behind him. "The rebels want a lesson. I have one here!"

Theo heard more than the hot words of the captain of the Philistines. His ears caught a sound not unknown within the precincts of Sunset

Captain Sid, the Shasta Ferret.

"They sha'n't draw you into this," exclaimed the last named. "A year ago I silenced a lot of growlers with the trigger. Their leader is over yonder on the mountain. No one knows that you were here. Go back to your hotel. I will be ruler over Philistia, or I'll be nothing."

Monte Cristo Teton felt himself pushed away by the man who spoke, and the next moment he was walking from the spot, wondering what the crack of Crimson Clint's revolver would bring about.

CHAPTER XI.

PHILISTINE AND NABOB.

THE 'Frisco nabob went back to his quarters unmolested, and, apparently, unseen.

It was not long before he heard the heavy tramp of feet, accompanied by confused voices.

"They have heard of the shooting," thought he. "Now we will know what will follow. Captain Clint owns a hot trigger, and—"

A heavy step fell near the door; it opened, and revealed the tall figure of a man whom Teton did not know.

His appearance showed that he was a Philistine, and Monte Cristo Teton waited for him to speak.

"The captain wants you," said the man.

"Wants me?"

"Wants you."

The man from 'Frisco was on the eve of telling his caller that he had just left Crimson Clint's shanty, when he took a second thought and checked himself.

"I'll go to the captain," he replied, and as he stepped forward he saw that the Philistine held a cocked revolver in his right hand.

"We're not all ag'in' you," remarked the Philistine, intercepting his glance. "Some o' us will stand by the captain through thick an' thin."

"What is up?" queried Colonel Teton, assuming an innocent air.

The man seemed to give him a credulous look.

"The whole thing will develop pretty soon," was the response. "It hinges on what Doctor Doc says."

Teton took a breath of relief.

The man shot by Crimson Clint was not dead. The mutinous Philistines might be held back by the captain's failure to kill him on the spot.

He went away with the man who had come for him, not straight toward Crimson Clint's cabin, but by a roundabout way, dodging in and out among the shanties, and keeping in the shadows thereof.

Teton kept his hand on the butt of his own six-shooter, and his eyes were ever on the alert.

No words were spoken between the two houses. Both men seemed to believe that absolute safety lay in silence, and in that alone. A California mob is not to be fooled with, and nobody knew this better than Nabob Teton.

By the roundabout path he was conducted to the rear door of Captain Clint's abode.

His guard pressed the latch, opened the door, and said "good-by" as he pushed him in and left him.

Colonel Teton heard the door shut behind him, but not with a sense of very great security.

He went forward and entered a room beyond the one he had first gained.

"He found you, did he?" said a man who entered from another door simultaneously with himself, and he looked into the face of the captain of the Philistines.

"He found me," answered Teton. "What has happened?"

"The storm has opened. My trigger set off the fireworks. The latest is that they're waiting for Doctor Doc's report."

"Who are?"

"The mutineers of Sunset—the men who want some excuse to rebel. I thought best to have you brought here, and before the ball fairly opens. I guess we've got to meet them squarely—that is, we and the Faithful. All are not rebels. There are men in Sunset who would die for me at the drop of a hat; but they are now in the minority. Of course we shall get no help from the Champions across the line. They won't help the others, either; but they'll stand off and let us fight it out among ourselves."

Teton could not reply before the door behind him was thrown open to admit a man, who started on seeing him in the room.

"What is it, Cactus?" asked Crimson Clint.

"We've got them all now. They number thirty-seven."

The chief of the Philistines seemed to wince. It was more than half.

"What says Doctor Doc?"

"He gives Theo till daylight."

"And the rebels?"

"They'll wait till he dies."

Captain Clint stole a glance at Monte Cristo Teton. The face of that individual was white where the skin could be seen.

"Is it spreading?" asked the Philistine chief.

"No; the rest are firm."

"Nineteen," said Crimson Clint, as if talking aloud to himself. "Do they know where Colonel Teton is?"

"Not yet."

The messenger withdrew and the Philistine and the nabob were alone.

"Can you get a secret message to Doctor Doc, as they call him?" suddenly asked the man from 'Frisco.

"What sort of message would you send?"

"I don't want the lives of many to hang on the breath of one."

"Oh, you'd pay the doctor to fetch Theo around, would you?"

"I'd enrich him if he would."

"Well, he can't," answered Crimson Clint, laying his hand upon the millionaire's arm.

"Doctor Doc knows more than the general run of camp doctors; but when a man is shot through the lungs at ten paces, he can't baffle death and put him on his feet."

"Is it that bad?"

"Yes, Theo's hours are numbered, and when his breath leaves him the rebels will come for blood."

Colonel Teton let his gaze wander across the room. Perhaps he wished for Shasta Sid at that moment, or that he stood beneath the roof of his own mansion instead of beneath Crimson Clint's.

He had not counted upon an event of this nature. He never thought of having to fight for his life with a mob of bronzed toughs before he could touch the big bonanza of Shasta Land.

Within the next thirty minutes more news came from the outside.

Doctor Doc had told Theo that he would die; but this was not all.

Stella had come to the dying man.

Crimson Clint started madly at this information.

"What has the girl crossed the line?" cried he.

"She has."

"Did she cross alone?"

"Alone."

"Where is she now?"

"With Theo in his shanty."

The captain of the Philistines reflected for a moment.

"Is she nursing him?"

"Yes."

"What did the men say?"

"They let the girl have her way."

"Yesterday they would have sent her back," said he between his teeth. "Send Doctor Doc to me."

The man departed.

In a few moments there walked into the room a handsome man with a clear gray eye and a flowing chestnut beard. He found Crimson Clint entirely alone.

"I want the truth with few words, doctor," said the Philistine. "What will the result be?"

"Death!" laconically answered Doctor Doc.

"When will it occur?"

"Between now and daylight."

"Is this your honest opinion?"

"I'll answer with my head."

"We won't require that," smiled Crimson Clint.

"What does he say?"

"Theo?"

"Theo."

"He says that you shot him because he rather hotly addressed Colonel Teton."

"Not because he had rebelled, then?"

"No."

"What will follow the death of Theo?"

"Trouble, perhaps."

Crimson Clint watched the doctor closely while he spoke.

"Trouble, eh?" he exclaimed. "The hot-heads will open the conflict, will they? Tell them, doctor—"

The putting forth of the surgeon's hand broke the Philistine's sentence.

"Don't make a messenger out of me, captain," were the words he heard. "Let me attend to the dying and bury him when he is dead. I ask nothing more."

Captain Clint drew off a step and looked strangely at the rough doctor of Sunset.

"Then go and perform that double duty!" he cried, pointing toward the door. "The chances are that you will be needed more than once within the next twenty-four hours. I won't draw you into the controversy."

Doctor Doc, whose eyes had lost none of their vivacity, retreated across the room and touched his hat to Captain Clint ere he opened the door and disappeared.

"Who is that man?" exclaimed a voice, and the Philistine captain saw Teton in the room.

"We call him Doctor Doc."

"But what is his true name?"

"Oh, we don't care for such things here," was the laughing rejoinder.

"But I care for that man's name," persisted Teton.

"An old acquaintance, is he?"

"An old enemy!"

"Not the one who meddled with the mine bargain?"

"That meddler belongs to the other sex. The man who just left is an old foe. Doctor Doc is but a mask."

"It may be. We are all masked here."

Colonel Teton made no response for a few moments.

"Twenty years ago a man took a ride across the Devil's Desert in the South," said he, when he spoke again, his gaze fixed upon Captain

Clint. "He started at midnight alone. His horse, a coal-black, looked nervy enough to carry him till the Day of Judgment, and those who sent him away thought at the time that their eyes would never see him more."

"Well, what of it?" cried the Philistine, who, with folded arms, had listened with impatience to the nabob's narrative. "I haven't thought of the Devil's Desert for nearly the period you have mentioned."

"Nor of the horse and his rider?"

"Nor of them."

"I can't say what eventually became of the horse, but the man has just left this house!"

Crimson Clint's look instantly became a stare of amazement.

"You have no proof of this," said he. "Some of our men afterward found the bones of a horse and a man united by remnants of tarred rope."

Colonel Teton smiled.

"You forgot that Mazeppas were common in that country in those days," answered he.

"Where have your eyes been all this time, Captain Clint? In Doctor Doc I see the midnight Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert. He may not play a very important part in the drama just opening, but he is in a position to make his hand felt. He knows that the death of Theo will precipitate matters. He holds the fate of your victim in his hands, and if he says that Theo will die before dawn, you may depend on it that he will. I have been here some time, but never met the doctor of Sunset until now. He is not Doctor Doc to me, but the rider of the black horse—the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert."

Crimson Clint did not reply.

Colonel Teton's narrative was a revelation which seemed to daze him, and he was not aroused until a six-foot Philistine sprung into the room.

CHAPTER XII.

A MAD DOCTOR.

CRIMSON CLINT'S look commanded the man to speak at once.

"The six Shadows of Shasta!" exclaimed the Philistine from the outside.

"Where are they?"

"Between the camp and the mountain."

Captain Clint looked at Colonel Teton.

"I have told you all I know about these fellows," said he. "They seem to be a set of wild devil-may-care ruffians, who invest their movements with some mystery. They are the men who enabled Shasta Sid to find the stirrup's victim in the pass. It is not very strange that they should appear here at this hour, as they are liable to turn up at any time. They have never molested us. I never saw them but once, and then after night, galloping through Echo Canyon like a troop of mounted ghosts."

"The six seem to have come for a purpose this time," remarked the messenger.

"Who saw them?"

"Dark Jule."

"The watch-dog of Sunset," smiled Crimson Clint. "We'll let the Masked Six show their hand at their leisure. We have affairs of our own to attend to. How goes the mutiny in camp?"

"It holds its own."

"Will it break out with Theo's death?"

"We think so."

"And not until then?"

"Not until then. But Theo has a nurse who combat's the doctor's opinion."

"How combats it?" exclaimed Crimson Clint.

"Stella, who does not leave him for a moment, says he need not die."

Colonel Teton seemed to catch a new breath of relief.

"If the girl would continue to nurse him, we might beat the mutineers with a weapon they do not think of."

"They won't let the girl stand between Theo and revenge," was the quick reply. "If Doctor Doc is the man you say he is, he will see that the girl doesn't pull him through."

"Doctor Doc says Theo will die," put in the Philistine messenger.

"So he does, and so the patient will."

Crimson Clint crossed the room several times in thoughtful mood. He ran his hand through his red beard, and was oblivious of the presence of any one for several minutes.

Then he turned abruptly upon the messenger and issued a few commands in sharp tones.

The Six Shadows were to be watched by no less a personage than Dark Jule, and, pending Theo's death, the faithful Philistines were to prepare quietly for the conflict which would follow swiftly on the heels of that event.

The messenger withdrew and Philistine and nabob were alone again.

"They won't let the girl nurse Theo long," said Crimson Clint. "The Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert, as we may call Doctor Doc, won't let Stella come between him and revenge. I now see the real starting-point of the mutiny. I can account for certain looks and movements by the doctor within the last few days. I shot the wrong man. It should have been the Esculapius of Sunset City."

Meantime, in another part of the camp, a

scene that demands our attention was transpiring.

In a small cabin, not unlike those by which it was surrounded, stood a young girl looking down upon the figure of a man stretched on a cot.

The poor lamplight which fell across his face showed her the pallor that rested there—the deathlike pallor which seemed to foretell the great change soon to come.

The silent and anxious looker-on was Stella, the person who had crossed the feud line to minister to the wants of the Philistine captain's victim. From the first she had received the dark looks of Doctor Doc; but his scowls had not daunted her, nor his glances lost Theo one soft touch.

A few steps beyond the cabin stood three men like statues planted firmly in the ground. They were sentries posted for the purpose of keeping the faithful Philistines away from Theo. Doctor Doc wanted his patient entirely in his own hands; but he had not dared to remove the girl who had come to his aid.

Stella stood statue-like where she had planted herself, and watched the wounded man with an expression of mingled tenderness and resolve.

More than once her eyes seemed to get an animated light; they even flashed; but these sparks would die away as quickly as they had leaped into being, and the queen of the Rattlesnake bonanza would be all pity and softness again.

Theo lay like one dead on the hard cot, but Stella could see that he was wide awake and conscious. His eyes seemed to be fixed on a certain spot among the rough rafters overhead. He had lain thus a long time, carefully regarded by the girl.

All at once Theo turned his head. There was a look of inquiry in his eyes.

In an instant Stella was beside the cot.

"Stella," said he, "if you stay with me, I'll pull through."

He said this with such confidence that the girl could not keep back a smile.

"Then you'll pull through, Theo," she replied.

He put up one of his hands and Stella took it.

"They don't want me to win, eh?" he went on.

"I don't know," answered Stella, cautiously.

The next moment a footstep sounded on the girl's ears. She let Theo's hand fall and stepped back.

As she did so, Doctor Doc stepped into the cabin.

He might have seen the scene just witnessed by the reader through the little window; but if he had, his face showed no traces of excitement.

The doctor of Sunset fresh from his interview with Captain Crimson, walked to the cot and bent over Theo.

Stella, falling back a step at his approach watched him with the eye of a hawk. She saw his dark hand at Theo's pulse; she noticed how closely he scanned the sufferer's face, and she thought she saw a scowl of disapprobation there.

"Isn't he dying fast enough for you, doctor?" Stella asked herself. "Are you so eager to unchain the Philistine tigers that you would hurry Theo along a little faster? You will find me here while there is a ray of hope."

Doctor Doc, quitting his patient, turned abruptly upon the girl.

"You can go back now," said he. "The young man is in no immediate danger."

She thought she read the doctor's real purpose in his eyes.

"I came here to remain," she answered firmly.

"But your mine—"

"The Rattlesnake is in good hands," she interrupted. "Were I to remain from it a solid month, its interests wouldn't suffer."

Doctor Doc, thus met, looked nonplussed.

He saw that he had an antagonist worthy of his steel.

He threw a hasty glance toward Theo and lowered his voice as he leaned forward.

"You're on dangerous ground," said he. "You have crossed the line, and there is rebellion here."

"Thanks, doctor, but I can't desert the man yonder," was the response.

"He is a Philistine."

"That stands as nothing in a case of this kind. I am the only woman in Sunset City, and my place is where I am."

Doctor Doc straightened and drew back.

He looked like a man who had been beaten in a play of his own choosing. He must have cursed the Star of Shasta in the very depths of his soul.

He looked once more at the occupant of the cot.

"You can't help him," he said to Stella. "Death's got him in its grip."

He spoke in tones intended for Theo's ears.

The wounded man's head turned at the words.

"If you'll give me a chance I'll break that grip," said he, fixing his gaze upon Doctor Doc.

"You can't," cried the surgeon of Sunset.

"All the doctors between the two oceans couldn't pull you through."

"I feel better."

"Of course," with a heartless laugh. "That's the nature of your wound. Captain Clint shot to finish you, and he did not fail. You are finished."

These were harsh words to be spoken to a man supposed to be dying, and they sent a thrill of resentment through Stella's nerves.

"I say he sha'n't die!" she exclaimed. "Give the case over into my hands and wait for the result."

Doctor Doc, his eyes seemingly ablaze, threw his head back and laughed.

"You jest, girl!" he exclaimed.

"Do I look like it?"

"By heavens, no; but you certainly don't expect to get him up."

"Give me a chance, I say."

"Give her a chance!" came from the cot.

The doctor of Sunset looked at Theo.

"I know who is the best doctor," the Philistine went on. "I'm willing to trust myself in Stella's hands. She belongs on the other side; but I can forget that."

"Do you doubt my skill? Do you question my friendship?" cried Doctor Doc, going toward the bed.

"I haven't said so," quietly answered Theo, looking up into his rage-distorted face. "I was shot in cold blood; but I haven't yet said a word about getting even. Time enough for that. But I say to you, Doctor Doc, that I want the girl to stay with me, if she will. There's strength and healing in her touch; there's hope in her eyes."

The doctor of Sunset turned away with a growl which Theo and Stella could interpret as they liked, and without a reply he pushed the door open and rushed out.

"That's not the last of him," thought the girl.

"Baffled now, he will try again. The doctor of Shasta is determined that his patient shall die.

Why? His death will open the war; it will precipitate the mutineer mob upon Captain Crimson and Monte Cristo Teton. I ought not to stand between the factions perhaps. Crimson has been my most persistent enemy; the Midas from 'Frisco has joined him in the game, but Doctor Doc can't have the life he wants in order to win his revenge. He can't kill Theo while I keep between."

The girl went to the window, watched by the man on the cot.

The camp beyond was still.

She wondered whether Doctor Doc had gone, and what his next move would be.

All at once she fell back with a cry of surprise on her lips.

A face had pressed suddenly against the dirty pane.

The bright eyes set in the white forehead had not seen her; they were fixed on the occupant of the cot.

In a moment the apparition had vanished, but Stella was left staring at the spot where it had been.

She wondered if Theo had seen it, but a glance at him told her that it had escaped his eye.

"It must have been the face of the girl whom the Tall Redwood saw in the mountains," thought Stella.

"In God's name, who is she? And what does she want here?"

If Stella could have looked into the future, brave as she was, she might have trembled.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FATE OF A FERRET.

WHEN the Drone of Harmony Hollow told Shasta Sid that he had seen the woman of the camp write the name of "Leone" on the ground, the nabob's detective knew that he had scored a point.

He had found the person whom Monte Cristo Teton most feared, and undoubtedly the one who had come between him and the Rattlesnake bonanza.

Shasta Sid, instead of going back to Sunset, resolved to learn more. He had not found out enough to satisfy him.

Leone was the enemy he had hunted so long. She was the person whose trail he had been trying to strike along with the trail of Delle Paso, the Mazepa of Echo Canyon. He had found Delle Paso headless and being dragged at the stirrup of his black horse; and now he had by a lucky stroke unearthed the woman in the game—Leone, Colonel Teton's old-time foe.

Gold Gomez had doubtless gone back to Sunset, but Shasta Sid lingered in the camp.

He wanted to see more of Leone.

When he stole back to the woman's abode after separating from the Drone, he walked to the place and tip-toed to the window.

The shanty, dark a few minutes before, was now illuminated by a lamp, and Shasta Sid beheld the woman writing at a table.

"Another message for the girl?" he asked himself. "I'd give a good deal if I could intercept it."

As the woman wrote steadily for some time he had a good opportunity for studying her from the window.

He saw her hand move over the paper, he now and then caught the light that brightened the depths of her eyes, and at last saw her throw down the pen and spring erect.

"He knows that somebody's hand is against him in his gold game," she exclaimed. "Does he think of me? Does he recall the woman who said to him years ago: 'When I operate again you go to the wall?' What is his spy—his dark-faced, long-haired ferret, whom he calls Shasta Sid—doing? Is he still on my trail? Take care, Captain Sid! The hand directed against the master can turn aside long enough to strike the slave!" Shasta Sid heard every syllable.

"I'm willing to play the game out!" said he. "Use all the cunning at your command, Lady Leone. Those black eyes and olive hands are sharp and dangerous; but remember that Shasta Sid's are pitted against them. A slave, am I? Well, woman, in this drama the slave may prove more dangerous than the master."

In a short time the sudden lowering of the light told the nabob's detective that something was about to happen, and he was not mistaken.

The door opened, letting the woman out, and Shasta Sid, hugging the logs of the cabin, saw her disappear toward the limits of the camp.

She carried with her the writing she had just finished, and the spy followed her.

It took a keen eye to follow the figure of Leone through the night. Shasta had divested himself of his boots at the start, and his feet sent out no sounds as he moved over the ground with his eyes fastened upon her and nothing else.

Lady Leone led the Shasta ferret to the shadows of the mountains.

Once or twice he nearly lost her among them.

At last the nabob's spy found himself on an elevated trail, from which he could see the lights of the basin camp far beneath.

Lady Leone was "lost" again, that is, he had not seen her for some seconds.

All at once a slight noise on his left caused him to look in that direction, and, to his amazement, he beheld the mingled figures of a horse and his rider.

They were between him and the stars, and not twenty feet away!

Shasta Sid's eyes appeared on the eve of leaping from his head. He tried to shrink back into the stone against which he stood, but not for an instant did he take his eyes from the apparition before him.

That the female in the saddle was Leone he did not doubt, but how had she reached the spot without disturbing him before?

He could not see her face for the night, but its contour served to strengthen his belief that she was the Queen of Harmony Hollow, and Monte Cristo Teton's enemy.

The sudden neighing of the steed startled Shasta Sid. The figure in the saddle, bending suddenly forward, seemed to single him out, and before he could move, a hand thrust a revolver into his face.

All this was the work of a second, as it were.

"Caught by the fox herself!" muttered Shasta Sid. "This is a play I don't relish. But what can I do?"

"Come out!" said the woman's voice. "I see you, and my pistol covers your head. If you don't want your brains to kiss the boulder, stand up and show yourself."

There was something in the voice and the menace of the six-shooter that decided the Shasta Shadow.

He stepped from the rock and stood erect.

"Come to me!" again commanded the woman.

"I want to see who you are."

Shasta Sid went forward with a quick-formed plan in his head; but the revolver, thrust into his very face, seemed to daunt him.

"Oho!" cried the woman, leaning over and looking into his upturned face as it was revealed by the brilliant starlight.

"Not the person you looked for, eh?" smiled Shasta Sid.

"Not the one. Who are you?"

The nabob's ferret, who stood almost against her steed's head, made no reply.

"You are not nameless," Leone—it was Lady Leone—went on.

"What if I were to tell you that I am one Fergus Flash?" queried Shasta.

"I would believe but little of the story."

"Then I need not name myself."

Leone took another long look at the man she had caught.

"Fergus Flash, did you say?"

"I mentioned the name."

"Well, I'll take you at your word. Where from?"

"From the world at large."

"You are armed?"

Shasta Sid said nothing.

"You will remove your revolvers," continued Lady Leone. "You will throw them one by one over your head."

The mountain ferret looked up into her stern face, but held his tongue.

"Come! be quick about it, Captain Flash!"

Shasta moved one hand slowly to his belt.

"What if I refuse to be despoiled?" he asked at last.

"The vultures will answer your question tomorrow?"

While a lip was being bitten through one revolver was produced, and the next moment it went over the detective's shoulder, and disappeared.

"The other, now," said Lady Leone.

The second weapon followed the first, and the mountain trailer waited for his captor's next move.

"Forward!" exclaimed the woman on horseback. "We will not part for a while yet, Fergus Flash! It is strange I have never heard the name before."

Shasta Sid could detect the sarcasm that lurked in Leone's voice. He knew she did not believe that he told the truth.

A few seconds later he was going down the trail which he had followed to the boulder.

The horse walked alongside with the keen eyes of the woman upon him, and the menacing revolver in her hand.

A journey of a mile brought them to a spot from which they could see the basin far below. It is true that objects were not plainly visible, but dark places told them where the clumps of timber were and a few lights like fallen stars located the hive of the Drones.

Shasta Sid stood between Lady Leone and the fringe of the trail.

He could not tell whether the wall was perpendicular, or whether it sloped—going down gently to the basin. The edge of the trail was bordered with a species of yellow flower which prevented him from deciding the question about the formation of the wall.

"We have come far enough, Fergus Flash," said Lady Leone. "I am going to leave you."

Shasta Sid started.

He was going to get shut of the woman who had brought him to the spot under the muzzle of the pistol.

She was going back to Harmony Hollow, or elsewhere, and he—He would return to his work and get even with her for her smart tricks.

"I don't think we will ever meet again," resumed Lady Leone. "Not, at least, in our present role. I'll tell your master when I see him how and where I left you. You are Shasta Sid. You belong to the doomed nabob of 'Frisco. You are the slave of Monte Cristo Teton, the man who gambles for new fortunes in the shadow of death!"

The man on the ground answered with a smile.

"What have you found out?" Leone continued. "You have unearthed me. You are ready to return to Colorey Teton and say 'I've found her!' You may report to him some time, Captain Sid; but not in the flesh."

"Then," said the man with his teeth closed, "then you are going to shoot me?"

"No. My revolver will not shed a drop of your blood unless you refuse to obey my last command. Face the basin, Shasta Sid. There! that is right. Now, forward!"

The man turned upon Leone with his face blanched to an ashen pallor.

"What? over the wall?" he cried, pointing toward the lights far down in the valley.

"Yes, over the wall!"

"That means death."

"Perhaps."

"You might as well kill me where I stand."

"Do you think so, Captain Sid?"

"I do."

"The leap gives you a chance—one in a million," said Lady Leone.

"Is the wall a straight one?"

"The jump will tell you."

Shasta Sid's teeth met again.

"One chance in a million," he thought.

"That's no chance at all."

"We can't debate the question," spoke Leone at this juncture. "I give you a minute. Nay, I will count five. You can decide before the fifth numeral how you will go over the wall—alive or dead. I begin now, Shasta Sid. One—"

Colonel Teton's detective tried to see a gleam of mercy in the woman's eye, but there was none.

"Two—three—"

Instead of stepping toward the edge of the cliff he fell back.

Once he thought of leaping toward the revolver and taking his chances there.

Then another thought flashed through his brain.

The wall might be covered, as such walls often were, with a net-work of vines; but then it might be as bare as glass!

He thought fast. Life was at stake.

"Four!" said the voice of Lady Leone.

The word drove Shasta Sid madly forward.

He looked up once more at the woman in the saddle.

He thought the last numeral was forming on her lips.

"By the living God! we'll meet again!" he exclaimed, and then, with his teeth hard set, he strode forward and vanished.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN WITH THE WINCHESTER.

The dawn of another day found Theo, the young Philistine, still alive.

The swarthy mutineers looked disappointed

at one another, and those who adhered to Crimson Clint's cause hardly knew what to make of it.

The former growlingly said that the girl, Stella, had come between, and she got many a dark look and curse for having come to Theo's rescue.

"It's the girl," said Doctor Doc, to a group of toughs in the gray light of morning. "Death was winning the victory right handsomely while the case was in my hands; but Stella stepped forward and—well, she is spoiling the game."

Meantime, Stella watched over the wounded man in the cabin.

It is supposed that she was afraid to leave him for a moment for fear of Doctor Doc's evil machinations, and when she looked out of the little window and saw the three stalwart mutineers on guard, she realized anew the dangerous situation.

Colonel Teton had not left Crimson Clint's house a moment since entering it. He was safe nowhere else until the mutiny should be subdued and the authority of the Philistine captain again recognized.

As he was not found at the hotel it was believed that he had taken refuge in Captain Clint's quarters, and that house shared with Theo's cabin the curiosity of the camp.

The sun had scaled the hills on the west, and was looking down upon Sunset City, when Doctor Doc came back to his patient.

His face showed that he had not forgotten the scene of the previous night, and he had a meanful scowl for Stella when he found her at her old post.

The girl watched the doctor narrowly.

She saw his lips come together with firmness the moment he looked into the eyes of the occupant of the cot.

Theo was better.

"I'm going to pull through," said the wounded man, in a voice quite strong. "Captain Clint should have aimed a little higher."

"He may have aimed high enough for all," was the response. "You need a stimulant."

A quick look passed between Theo and the queen of the mines.

"Just as you think, doctor," said Theo, and the surgeon of Sunset turned to the table where he took from an inner pocket a little buckskin case.

Stella, standing aloof, saw him drop some whitish liquid into a small whisky-glass, then he added some water to the medicine, and looked up.

His look was met by the girl's.

Undaunted by her eyes, Doctor Doc picked up the glass and turned toward the cot.

In an instant a footstep fell on the floor behind him.

Stella had stepped forward.

"Must he have it right away?" asked she, her eyes fixed upon the glass in the doctor's hand. "Why can't I administer it as well as yourself?"

"So you could, miss," answered Doctor Doc. "But as I am here, I will give him the first dose, leaving the administering of the rest to you."

Another step brought the Star of Shasta to his side, and all at once, her hand, swooping downward like an eagle, closed on his wrist near the glass.

"What means this?" demanded the Shasta doctor, glaring at the girl with eyes that seemed to pierce her through.

"He doesn't need the potion. He is getting along without it, and, besides, you mutineers don't have to wait for his death to open the battle."

At the same time Stella gave the wrist she held a sudden twist, and the contents of the glass were spilled on the floor at the side of the cot.

"They wouldn't submit to interference like yours in any other camp!" he exclaimed, breaking from the girl's grip and drawing back.

"I have asked no man here to submit to it," was the quick rejoinder. "With Theo's consent, I am his nurse, and, as such, I shall have a say in the treatment of his case."

"What do you think I was giving him?"

"Never mind what I think, Doctor Doc."

"Do you—"

He broke his own sentence like a man choking himself with rage. His face was scarlet in color.

"You're in Philistia!" he began again.

"You've crossed the line uninvited."

"Yes. I shall go back at my leisure."

"Unless you go sooner!"

He went to the door and with his hand on the latch looked over his shoulder at Stella and Theo, but more particularly at the girl.

"It won't be long till your game ends!" cried he. "We don't have to wait till death throttles him. Wait and see if we do!"

He tore the door open and went out.

"There was death in the glass," said the tenant of the cot when the mine-queen came forward. "It was Doctor Doc's desperate play. Which way did he take?"

Stella sprung to the window and looked out.

The figure of the baffled doctor was still in

sight, and she watched it until it vanished beyond the door of a certain cabin.

"He has entered Blonde Buck's shanty," said she, with a look at Theo.

"One of the masters of the revolt," was the reply.

"The captain of the mutineers."

"They'll put their heads together and hatch out some infernal plot."

"There's no doubt of it," smiled Stella. "The rebels won't hold back much longer. They want to rid the camp of the 'Frisco Midas, Colonel Teton, more than anything else. They don't care for you, Theo."

"Not a straw. Blonde Buck and I never were good friends, and Doctor Doc's face has always had a scowl for me."

The girl went to the window again.

"The guards have been withdrawn," said she.

"That means something."

"Yes; we must wait and see."

Theo watched the girl with unabated interest. The warm sunlight pouring in at the window bathed her face in a halo of brightness, and cast her shapely figure in shadow on the opposite wall.

"Here comes Gold Gomez!" suddenly exclaimed Stella. "The withdrawal of the guards clears the coast for him."

"Captain Gomez isn't one of the rebels."

"No; he stands by Captain Crimson."

The man whom Stella had named was nearing the cabin, watched, though she knew it not, by more than one pair of gleaming eyes.

"I wonder if he comes from her again?" thought the Star of Shasta, her mind going back to the sender of the message which had prevented the consummation of the bargain for her mine. "He is very bold to seek me in the teeth of the mutineers; but there isn't a drop of coward blood in Gomez's body."

"Halt, thar, Gold Gomez!" suddenly rang out a voice which the girl heard at her station by the window.

The second captain of the Philistines stopped at sound of the voice and looked back.

He saw what Stella had already seen—the tall and stalwart figure of a man with a flowing blonde beard. He had stepped from a cabin previous to his command, and now faced Gomez with a cocked Winchester lying in the hollow of his arm.

"What is this?" asked Gomez, looking at the man, who was Blonde Buck, the captain of the rebels.

"Keep away from that shanty!" came across the space in reply.

"You've taken away your guards."

"What if we have? It stands on our ground all the same."

Gomez was close enough to Theo's cabin to show Stella at the window the workings of his face. At the first command his hand had leaped, instinctively as it were, to his revolver, and she saw that it was half-drawn, while he looked at the desperado with the Winchester.

The scene had attracted a dozen men. They stood on Blonde Buck's side of the ground, and were evidently of his adherents.

As to Gomez, he stood in the shadow of the rifle with the eye of the mutineer chief fixed upon him, and near enough to let him see the dark finger that rested within the trigger-guard.

"What is it?" asked Theo from the bed.

"They stopped Gomez and are holding him at bay," was the answer.

"Who halted him?"

"Blonde Buck."

"With his Winchester?"

"Yes."

"What will Gomez do?"

"Ah! that is what I'm anxious to see."

"Is he cool?"

"He could not be cooler."

Theo showed by his actions how interested he was.

"Gold Gomez is moving!" suddenly cried Stella.

"Which way?"

"Toward Captain Buck."

"Will there be a collision, think you, Stella?"

"A minute will tell the tale."

"It'll be an hour to me," replied Theo.

It was true, as the mine-queen had said, that Gomez was moving toward the man by whom he had been halted.

Blonde Buck watched him with a triumphant smile lurking among his handsome beard.

Within twenty steps of the man with the Winchester the Philistine captain halted. He saw directly in front of him the form of Blonde Buck, and beyond it, in the cabin door, that of Doctor Doc, the double-face of the camp.

"I come to you because we should not fall out like a pack of wolves," said Gomez.

The man who heard him laughed.

"We don't want to compromise with any one," answered Blonde Buck. "The free men of Sunset City have just decided. They ask the immediate departure of Monte Cristo Teton: they demand the exile of the girl-Jonah of the camp. They will take no backward step, come what may. You, Gold Gomez, can carry our ultimatum to Captain Clint; the girl may hear me now, as her ears are sharp. We will wear

no yoke; we will own no ruler who comes from the city of the nabobs!"

Stella, who had heard every word of Blonde Buck's speech, his voice, loud and strong, reaching everywhere as it seemed, waited breathlessly for Gold Gomez's reply.

She saw his hand fall away from the revolver it had clutched until then and drop at his side.

"No bloodshed; thank Heaven!" she cried.

"You can't win; you and your fellows can't!" said Gomez, covering Captain Buck with his finger. "Colonel Teton is now under a curse which you can't break, and Queen Stella will not be driven from Sunset by your threats."

His hand dropped again, he swept the line before him with the look of an eagle, and Stella, as she clapped her hands in approval of his coolness, saw him turn his back upon the crowd and walk away with the step of a conqueror.

He was not afraid of a bullet in the back.

CHAPTER XV.

THE APPARITION BECOMES REALITY.

"THAT man is dangerous," said Doctor Doc.

"Dangerous!" echoed Blonde Buck. "Pish! doctor."

"You shall see."

Gomez was followed by a good many eyes as he walked toward his own abode a few rods distant.

The captain of the rebels, with his Winchester still resting in the hollow of his arm, turned away before the Philistine was out of sight.

"I noticed that he stopped when I said stop," he remarked to the doctor. "He knew what I had for him," here he tapped the rifle, "and he wasn't going to take any risks."

Stella, who had witnessed these scenes, as we know, related the finish to Theo who had watched her all the time with the greatest anxiety.

"That isn't the end of it," rejoined Crimson Clint's victim at the end of the narrative.

"It is but the beginning," answered the girl. "The mutineers think that Gold Gomez favors the coming of Colonel Teton to Sunset, but he does not. He has no love for the 'Frisco Midas. He will not lift a hand in his defense. There is where Blonde Buck and his pards misjudge him. Because he is not a rebel, they think him willing to wear the new yoke."

"But he will obey Captain Clint?"

"He may, because the rebels hate him," replied Stella, quickly. "For some time there has not been much love between the captains of the Philistines. Crimson Clint has had Gomez watched. I know that."

"Why, Stella?"

The girl's face flushed ere she replied.

Theo did not press the inquiry, and Stella did not see fit to enlighten him.

"Are you afraid to remain here alone awhile?" she suddenly asked.

"Afraid of what?"

"I hardly know; but you are not afraid?"

"No, I am not."

"I am going back to my own," continued Stella. "I may be needed there. When the storm bursts over Philistia, as burst it will ere long, there are those who must be held back. This is not our fight. The Champions must not take a hand in the *melee*. It is Philistine against Philistine and nabob. There will be hot times. I know the mettle of each side, and so do you, Theo."

"It will be hot, indeed," repeated the young man, with a smile.

"I shall be back by nightfall, perhaps sooner," resumed the girl.

Theo put up his hand, and Stella pressed it firmly ere she went away and left him alone.

His deep eyes followed her wistfully until her figure vanished, and then, having put his hand beneath his pillow and felt his revolvers there, he lay back and half closed his eyes.

Stella walked straight to that side of the camp where her own abode lay.

She was seen by a score of men, who watched her until she crossed the divide and entered her cabin.

A moment later the door opened and the giant form of the Tall Redwood stood before her.

"Back safe and sound, eh?" smiled the overseer of the coveted bonanza.

"Back safe, Captain Redwood," smiled the girl.

"It was a risky move; but they're not united over there. I guess that's what got you through."

"Perhaps."

"I've seen her again, Stella."

"Seen whom?"

"The girl I saw in the canyon. What is more, I've corralled her."

In an instant Stella's look showed her mingled interest and eagerness.

"Where is she?"

"In the mine."

"Now?"

"Now!"

"In what quarter of the Rattlesnake?"

"I left her in the triangular chamber."

"Alone?"

"Quite alone."

"Who is she?"

"Ah! there's where I stop," grinned the Tall Redwood. "But I tell you that she's in some way connected with Colonel Teton, the 'Frisco Croesus."

"Did she say so?"

"She asked if he war hyer."

"Is she young?"

"Not past twenty. She's got eyes that flash up at times like powder, but ten times more brilliant."

"In the triangular chamber, did you say, Captain Redwood?"

"I left her there."

Before the hour had waned the girl mine-queen might have been seen entering the mouth of her famous bonanza.

Thoughts of the person she was about to meet filled her mind. She remembered the face seen at the window of Theo's cabin, and wondered if she would not find it in the heart of her mine.

Groping her way down the dark corridors, Stella reached what appeared an open archway where she came to a halt.

She had reached the triangular chamber.

It was dark ahead, and no sound fell upon her ears.

Presently she went forward again and drew a lucifer across the wall at her right.

An exclamation startled her as she held the blazing match above her head, and she saw that she was not the only tenant of the place.

In front of her stood the person described by the Tall Redwood—a beautiful young girl with a faultless figure and a face strangely like the one she had seen at Theo's window.

"I am Manon," said the strange creature, stepping forward. "Who are you?"

The name had a queer sound for Stella. It was one she had never heard spoken before.

But she soon was herself again.

"I am Stella," she answered.

"I thought so, and yet I asked," was the rejoinder. "Stella? Then you are the owner of this mine?"

"I am."

The match going out admonished the mine-queen that they would soon be left in darkness, therefore she lit another and said:

"I have a lamp in the office. Shall we go thither?"

"Yes, if you wish."

The following minute Stella was leading her new acquaintance through Cimmerian gloom to the office where she kept her own accounts and advised with the Tall Redwood.

Not a word was spoken during the journey, and when Stella had ushered Manon into the little room and closed the heavy door behind them she (Manon) was the first to break the silence.

"I've heard of you many times," said she, her eyes fixed upon the person she addressed.

"Of me?" queried Stella, surprised.

"Yes, your fame has gone beyond Sunset City."

"Because I happen to have a mire?"

"I don't know. Will you let me look at you?"

"Certainly."

Manon stepped back and looked steadily at Stella for some time.

"What very bright dangerous eyes she has," thought the girl queen of Shasta Land. "Captain Redwood was right. Her eyes can flash. They're doing that now."

"Do you resemble your mother?" suddenly asked Manon.

"I don't know, I don't think I ever saw her."

"What! Never saw your mother?"

"I have no recollections of her."

For an instant the flashing eyes had a look of pity.

"He says I don't resemble my mother!" exclaimed Manon.

"Do you mean your father?"

"Yes. Colonel Teton!"

Stella almost recoiled from the unexpected words.

"I startle you," said Manon. "I thought I would. Colonel Teton is my father, but they say there isn't the slightest resemblance between us. All 'Frisco says that. It says, too, that I bear no resemblance to my mother as she is remembered by some. I'm glad I don't. If I looked like Monte Cristo Teton I'd want my looks destroyed—blotted out by disease or something just as terrible. I'm glad I don't resemble him."

Stella felt a nameless chill creep to her heart at these utterances.

"Is he going to get hold of your mine?" Manon went on.

"I think not."

"That's what brought him up here."

"Yes."

"I know it."

"Where is his spy—his mountain ferret?"

"Shasta Sid?"

"Shasta Sid!"

"I don't know."

"You have seen the swarthy Vidocq?"

"Many times."

"He is keen and tireless—just the sort of man Colonel Teton wants."

"I can't say anything about that."

"He came up here some months ago for a

double purpose. He was to find two people. One he found headless in Echo Canyon. I have seen the inscription he scratched on the rock over the corpse of Delle Paso. The other person, a woman, he did not find."

"A woman?" echoed Stella.

"The woman whom I resemble, ha, ha!" laughed Manon.

The fair owner of the Rattlesnake could not take her eyes from this beautiful creature.

"Colonel Teton can't keep all his secrets from me," Manon went on. "The walls of the 'Frisco palace have ears. His spy's report was enough to send him off to Shasta Land. Why did I come, eh? I see the question in your eyes."

Stella did not reply.

"I want to be near him," Manon continued, her eyes suddenly flashing again. "He wants to be the nabob in Sunset, I hear. He has set the Philistines by the ears. The whole camp is in an uproar. You're at the bottom of it."

"Me?" echoed Stella.

"You! Because if you had not owned the accursed mine, he wouldn't have come."

"I did not invite him."

"No, of course not; but the golden bait lured him. He offered you big money for the bonanza."

"He did."

"And you were tempted, weren't you?"

Stella flushed.

"You would have sold if some hand had not interfered. Now, whose hand was it?"

The girl mine-queen did not answer.

"A secret, is it?" cried Manon. "The identity of the meddler is a secret which you will not disclose!"

"There are some things which one is expected to keep."

"I like courage. I have been told that you have plenty of it—that you have fought the Philistines for months; that you have crossed the death-divide to nurse one of them who carries Captain Crimson's bullet in his body. I don't want to become your enemy but we can't be friends while you keep the secret you have mentioned!"

"I want no more enemies. I have enough," said Stella.

"But unless you tell me who came between—unless you name the hand that broke off your bargain with Monte Cristo Teton—you will have one more, and the most dangerous one of all!"

The girl Croesus thought a moment before she spoke again.

"Then, it must be so!" said she.

Manon, with her dark eyes apparently on fire again, covered the door with a quivering finger.

"Open the door for me!" she cried.

Stella obeyed.

"I'd finish you if I stayed here another moment. I may do it yet!"

And then the Queen of Shasta was alone.

CHAPTER XVI.

EIGHT WINCHESTERS.

"IN Heaven's name," thought Stella, "what manner of creature is she?"

The girl Croesus waited until the footsteps of Manon had died away in the dark distance.

She Monte Cristo Teton's child?

It did not seem possible, and yet Manon had asserted her claims to that position.

There was no resemblance between the two, and if the fair creature fresh from the South had the nabob's blood in her veins she must have her mother's face.

Stella went back to her own little abode.

It would have been a relief to her to have found the Tall Redwood there; but the giant overseer was absent. She was not permitted to remain alone long, for a wiry little man with sparkling eyes opened the door without knocking and stood before her.

"We've had a meetin' an' resolved that we'd rather you would not go back," said Stella's visitor.

"Back where, major?"

"Why, to the wounded Philistine across the line. It's their fight, Miss Stella, not ours. We kin sit back and see the gang rend one another as they're about to do. We don't want you to go back."

"But I promised him."</

"You, major?" queried Stella, eagerly
"Where?"

"I don't say that she was Manon's mother, mind you," he corrected. "The woman I'm talking about I saw years ago in Tucson. They called her the Queen o' the Trigger there. I saw her step from the porch o' the "Twin Decks" and send a bullet through a Mexican captain's head. The girl looks like her; she's the very image of the Trigger Queen, but if she is Colonel Teton's daughter, why she can't well have that woman's blood in her veins."

The girl-queen of Sunset was thoughtfully silent for a minute after the little man's last words.

"So you're goin' back to Theo!" resumed her visitor.

"Yes."

"Be careful, then. The big game of knife an' trigger is about to open. You'll be in the midst of it, an' both factions hate the queen of this side o' the line."

"I'll be watchful, major," responded Stella. "I know these fellows. We've had dealings with them off and on for months, and I know what they are."

The sun had begun his descent of the western sky when the door of Theo's cabin opened softly and Stella stole across the threshold.

In a moment the eyes of the two people met.

"I guess they've abandoned me," said Theo, with a smile.

"Has Doctor Doc been here?"

"No. Captain Buck in passing looked in at the window. I saw his triumphant eyes, and watched them, though he thought me asleep, until he went away. No one has come since. What are they doing!"

Theo's question showed his anxiety.

Stella told him all she knew, with the exception of her strange interview with Manon in the mine.

"Whose voice was that?" suddenly cried the occupant of the cot, clutching her sleeve. "Has the battle opened?"

Stella went to the door and looked out.

"One of the Six Shadows has come," said she.

"What! come to Sunset?" exclaimed Theo.

"Even so."

"Alone?"

"I see but one."

The girl Croesus looked again and studied the strange person who sat on a black horse in the very center of the plaza.

He was a man of stalwart frame, and sat his steed with the poise of a statue in bronze.

His head was surmounted by a wide-brimmed hat, from beneath which his black hair fell in heavy masses upon his shoulders. His face was concealed from forehead to chin by a white mask, whose only openings were those made for the eyes. He wore gray clothes, faced with silver braid, and his high boots had spurs of enormous size.

Already two-thirds of Philistia were staring at him, and a dozen Champions were looking over the dead line at the same dread object.

The Six Shadows of Shasta had held people up in other quarters; they had performed some lawless deeds all around Sunset, but never before had one of them polluted the camp with his presence.

While Stella looked she saw him rise suddenly in his stirrups, she saw his right hand move upward until it rested on a level, then she waited for him to speak.

"To the men of Sunset, greeting!" exclaimed the unknown. "Captain White-Hood wants to see harmony among you all. When dogs fall out the wolf gets the bone."

A boisterous laugh followed this speech.

The Shadow turned, and beheld Blonde Buck, his inseparable Winchester resting, as of old, in the hollow of his arm, and his hat thrown back over his high, dark forehead.

"The dogs o' Sunset have fallen out, but the wolf don't get the bone," continued the Philistine.

"The fight is not yet fairly on. Beware!"

The two eyes behind the mask were fixed upon Captain Buck.

"We'll risk it, Captain White-Hood!" laughed Blonde Buck. "This is our affair."

"Certainly," answered the man in the saddle. "Dog and dog."

The leader of the rebels scowled.

"No quarrel with you and yours," he rejoined. "We give you the freedom of the mountains."

"We took that long ago."

"Just as you like," and Blonde Buck bit his lips.

The Shadow of Shasta turned from the man with the Winchester, and ran his eye along the groups of men by whom he was anxiously watched.

"Good-by," said he, touching his hat, and the next moment he was riding toward Stella, who had not, since discovering him, left her position in the door.

Intense curiosity held her to the spot.

She wanted a close view of the mysterious leader of the Six Shadows, and as he came forward her eyes became fastened upon him.

All at once Captain White-Hood seemed to dis-

cover her. She saw him rein in his steed and look searchingly at her.

A singular feeling came over her.

There was fascination in the eyes behind the white mask; they seemed capable of looking into her very heart and reading the inmost secrets there.

"Why don't you get out of this serpent's nest?" suddenly exclaimed the unknown. "Sell your mine and go away. Take Captain White-Hood's advice and depart before it is too late!"

Stella could not speak before the black steed started on once more, and a moment afterward she saw the mysterious man galloping toward the mountain amid rising clouds of dust.

She looked after him until he was no longer visible, and then turned toward the square.

Blonde Buck and his followers had come together in a single group there.

She could see amid them all the head of the rebel captain; she could hear his voice now and then, but could not distinguish his words.

Before the crowd dispersed a man emerged from one of the cabins bearing a pole. Something fluttered from the top of it like a piece of paper.

Captain Buck and his companions took off their hats and cheered.

Stella saw the man advance to the middle of the square and plant the pole in a hole there.

"That is our platform, men of Sunset!" rung out the voice of Blonde Buck, as he stepped into full view with his hand pointing toward the pole.

"The paper reads: 'Down with the 'Frisco Midas! No more yokes for the Pards of Shasta!'"

A vociferous cheer greeted the rebel leader.

"What is that?" asked Theo.

Stella told him.

"The opening of the battle," said the young Philistine.

When the mountaineers drew off the pole was seen standing alone, its defiant inscription waving in the breeze.

At the door of his own abode stood Gold Gomez who had witnessed the whole proceeding.

"Somebody will tell Captain Crimson," thought the girl. "His adherents won't let the manifesto defy them long. It is a dare which they will not submit to if they are determined to stand by Monte Cristo Teton. Will Crimson Clint desert his new friend? Will he say to the man from 'Frisco—Manon's father—'you must go back?'"

More than once during the next thirty minutes the girl-Croesus looked out upon the plaza. The pole was apparently unguarded.

The last time a scene seemed to turn her into a statue of horror in the doorway.

There were advancing upon the pole from toward Crimson Clint's abode twenty robust, dark-faced men.

"The crisis has come!" murmured Stella.

She saw that the captain of the Philistines marched erect at the head of the band.

He had come out from his house; he had faced the emergency with his old coolness.

While she gazed, Stella wondered what had become of Colonel Teton. By whom was he guarded? And where was his ferret, Shasta Sid?

She kept her eyes on the men as they approached the square.

Crimson Clint led them straight toward the pole.

Where was Blonde Buck and his fellow rebels?

Now was the time for them to show their grit.

The paper fluttered within reach of a tall man's hand.

Captain Clint had regarded it from the first, and when he reached the pole he threw up his hand with an eagerness that thrilled the girl-watch.

The next instant the doors of four cabins flew open simultaneously, and there sprung into the sunlight eight men armed with Winchesters.

A cry which she could not keep back leaped from Stella's throat.

"Hands off!" shouted Blonde Buck, as the repeating rifles came up, and eight swarthy faces met the stocks.

A defiant oath was the quick response, the hand of Captain Clint tore the paper from the pole, and in a second it was in fragments at his feet.

The following moment the crack of firearms almost lifted Stella off her feet.

The battle of the Philistines had opened with a volley from Blonde Buck's Winchesters.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NABOB'S PEST.

THERE was tumbling right and left. Men pitched forward, or staggered back to drop dead in the shadow of the pole.

There were no blank cartridges in the Winchesters of Blonde Buck and his gang.

The result of the volley showed Crimson Clint standing almost alone where he had defied the mutineers of Sunset City.

With the solidity of a statue he faced the band, a heavy six-shooter in his right hand and defiance in his eyes.

All at once he left his place and took three steps toward the executioners.

"You have opened the battle!" cried he, singling out Blonde Buck with uplifted hand. "Rule or ruin' is the motto you have adopted. Well, I am here to tell you that you shall not rule!"

A laugh was all the response he got. It sounded devilish to Stella, who heard it.

"Come!" said Captain Clint to those whom the volley had spared. "Leave them where they are." And he looked at the dead men about the pole; and placing himself at the head of his followers, he led them away, walking like a victor and watched until the last moment by the armed enemy.

"That is the beginning. What will the end be?" thought Stella and she went back into the cabin and acquainted Theo with the results of the one-sided battle.

Crimson Clint's lips seemed knit together when he entered his own abode and met there the white-faced and anxious nabob.

"How many?" asked Colonel Teton.

"Six," answered Captain Clint.

"Six of the mutineers?"

"No; six of the loyal."

"And of theirs how many?"

"Not one yet."

Brief was the explanation that followed.

Monte Cristo Teton looked down at the floor.

"If I had not come those men would not have been sacrificed," the captain of the Philistines heard him say.

"Don't weaken," said he in tones that made the nabob start. "What are six men to the biggest bonanza in California? Hundreds have died for empty pockets. Besides, your coming separates the loyal from the disloyal—the sheep from the goats, as it were. I know them now. No! no weakening, colonel; no regrets. The dead are dead. The battle is to be fought by the living, and by heavens! the living will fight it!"

Colonel Teton, in a moment of sudden bravery, put out his hand which the Philistine took, and for a second the two men looked silently into each other's faces.

In a little while members of Captain Clint's band dropped into the house.

Their almost pale faces told their determination, and their covert looks at Monte Cristo Teton were not complimentary to that gentleman.

"Who's this new girl what's come?" suddenly asked one of the men.

"A new girl, ha?" ejaculated Captain Clint and the 'Frisco Croesus started visibly.

"Yes, a young woman from somewhat South," continued the questioner.

"What is she like, Joram?"

The man called Joram gave a brief but glowing description of Manon whom he had seen.

"My God!" cried Colonel Teton with a quick glance at Crimson Clint. "'Tis Manon!"

"It can not be," said the Philistine captain.

"The description fits her perfectly," persisted the nabob.

"But what lured her from home?"

"Ay, that is it."

"Manon is my daughter." Colonel Teton addressed the Philistines. "I desire that she be conducted to me at once, when found," and then he lapsed into thoughtful silence, retiring to an adjoining room and remaining there until the men had withdrawn.

"You never saw Manon, I believe?" he said to Crimson Clint when that worthy had joined him.

"Never."

"She isn't a whit like her mother. She is the very picture of Lady Leone."

"No!" exclaimed Crimson Clint.

"You will say so when you see her," was the reply. "She has Leone's disposition. She has long hated me with that creature's hatred. It is something remarkable."

Captain Clint looked out of the window.

He saw that the day had died out, and that a night whose events no prophet could forecast was at hand.

"If they find Manon your wishes will be obeyed," he said turning suddenly upon Colonel Teton. "She has probably followed you with fears for your safety—"

"Manon have such fears?" broke in the nabob.

"You don't know the girl cast in the witch's likeness! Fears for my safety? Pish! something else brought her to Shasta Land. Time will reveal it."

Left alone by the retirement of Crimson Clint, the Croesus of 'Frisco stood for some time among the shadows at the window.

Did he wish himself back in the palace on the hill? Had he regretted the step he had already taken toward Stella's bonanza?

No. The coming of the girl who must be Manon troubled him.

He seemed to see new danger, new complications, in her presence.

If she had his blood in her veins, she had the dislikes, the very looks, of his bitterest foe—Lady Leone, upon whose trail he had set Shasta Sid, now strangely missing.

What had become of his human ferret?

He wondered if he would turn up to tell him that he had found the hand which had come

tween him and the bonanza, and that that hand was Leone's.

The shadows outside grew deeper and darker until they were one.

The camp had grown deathly quiet.

The six stiff figures about the pole in the square had not been disturbed since their fall.

They might have companions before day; there was no telling.

All at once Colonel Teton was startled by the opening of a door in the room beyond the one he occupied.

He heard footsteps and voices, and left his window with curiosity stamped upon his countenance.

Had Captain Clint come back?

As he touched the latch the door opened in his face, and a voice exclaimed:

"Here he is!"

A sudden fear sent Colonel Teton's hand toward his revolver, but a second later, he fell back a pace and stared at the figure of—Manon.

"We found her, colonel," said the same voice.

"She didn't like to come at first; but here she is all the same," and the two toughs who had escorted the girl to the house withdrew and left the pair together.

The Man from 'Frisco waited until the door had shut upon them ere he addressed the girl who had come.

"What means this?" he exclaimed.

Manon's figure seemed to get another inch in stature.

"I had no orders to remain at home," said she with a haughty smile. "Besides there is excitement in Shasta Land, there is none in 'Frisco."

"There is death here," replied the nabob.

"I know that; but why should it frighten me?"

"When did you come?"

"I've been in the mountains some time. Black Jess bore me up in good shape; she seemed to know the way."

"You will go back to-morrow. The animal will carry you south with the same care with which she brought you up here."

Colonel Teton's eyes could read Manon's answer before a single word of it had left her tongue.

"I remain until I send myself back, if ever!" exclaimed Manon. "You forget that I am no longer a girl, but a woman! You must not think that because you have found in the heart of Shasta Land, men who have made your cause theirs, that you can send me back over the 'Frisco trail by a word. Where is your detective? What has become of Captain Sid, the man who has trailed and hunted for you these many months? Has he found Leone? We know where Delle Paso is. I have read the inscription on the wall of the canyon. No, Colonel Teton; I have sought Shasta Land to remain until I think it time for me to go."

"You will become involved in the war of the giants."

"Then I will gain the excitement I seek."

Manon's coolness forced Colonel Teton to bite his lips from vexation.

"You have said that I look like your enemy," the girl went on. "You tell Shasta Sid that I resemble the woman called Lady Leone—that my mother left me no part of herself as her dying legacy."

"It is true!" cried Teton, impulsively. "Instead of having the blood of the gazelle, you have that of the tigress. Your mother, thank Heaven, died before she could note the disposition ill fate had given you. It wasn't long before you showed Lady Leone's heart and face. I watched the growth of your tiger nature with feelings which you can imagine. I saw it expand day after day, and more than once I felt like stealing into the nursery and throttling you!"

Colonel Teton paused, and Manon met his last sentence with a light laugh.

"Perhaps you should have let your feelings have full sway," she said, at length. "If I have the blood and the looks of Lady Leone, I may give you trouble."

It seemed to Manon that his face suddenly grew dark.

"Do you think so?" he exclaimed, bending toward her. "Remember that it is lawful to protect one's self, even in advance."

"I've seen the girl with the mine," answered Manon, seeming to take no notice of the threat in his last words.

"Ha! where?"

"In her mine. She did not give me much satisfaction."

"What sort of satisfaction did you seek?"

"A little information."

"A secret, perhaps?"

"Yes, a secret. Stella can show her grit in more ways than one."

Colonel Teton said nothing.

"She refused to tell me who interfered to spoil the golden trade."

"You might have known that she would."

"I hate the Bonanza Queen!" cried Manon, clinching her hands at her sides. "I told her so. I made her open the door and let me out. My blood seemed on fire; her coolness was the match that ignited the current. I am Queen

Stella's enemy! If she had been born to you instead of me, things might be different."

"Yes, entirely different," remarked the Man from 'Frisco.

"As it is, I fight her!" continued Manon. "If Shasta Sid finds Lady Leone, as he should, for I am convinced that her hand broke the bargain, there will be three women in the game. Are you going to stay and face the rebels of Sunset?"

"I shall stay!"

"They have rebelled because of you."

"They say so."

"Six men have already fallen! Colonel Teton—I don't say 'father,' because I look like Lady Leone—if your greed for gold had not drawn you from 'Frisco the six corpses around the death pole would be living men at this hour."

There was no response, and the girl fixed her gaze upon the California Croesus, and looked at him until he dropped his eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BACK FROM THE DEAD.

CREEPING through the shadows of overhanging rocks and lofty pines, with a vaulted field of stars overhead and dangerous ground in front, might have been seen the figure of a stalwart man.

In order to acquaint the reader with its identity let us go back a step in our story.

The incident of Shasta Sid's disappearance over the edge of the mountain wall, has not, we are sure, escaped the reader's memory.

Menaced by the six shooter of Lady Leone, the nabob's ferret took the chances and vanished from sight.

If the wall was perpendicular with no vines, why, he would be dashed to death at its foot; if it was covered with tenacious climbers as some walls sometimes were, there was a hope, slight, but still a hope.

When Shasta Sid felt himself quitting the trail his heart rushed into his throat as it were.

The lights of the far-away basin camp disappeared in an instant, and he fell down—down—To death?

All at once he stopped and instinctively clutched the objects that met his hands. They had closed on the wished-for vines; the strong mountain creepers had caught him like a net; and he was quick enough to take advantage of their aid.

He looked up, but could see nothing.

The vines covered him and a gleam of victory lit up his eyes while he held on.

He could not see the head that appeared over the edge of the wall, and when it disappeared he was left to his fate.

The one chance in a thousand had saved him! Shasta Sid kept his place until some minutes had passed.

He discovered that he had torn a mass of vines loose in his descent, and that it would be the height of folly to attempt to ascend to the trail above.

"An eye for an eye in the future, Lady Leone!" exclaimed the California ferret. "The next time the boot may be on the other foot; then, look out!"

An hour passed before he began to trust the vines in a further descent. He crawled out from his "nest" and went down carefully. Far below, nestling in the starlight, lay the basin and its cabins. He saw the lights once more, and wondered if one did not shine in Leone's cabin.

Not until he had set foot on solid ground again did he give way to a single congratulation.

A brief rest at the foot of the wall and he went back. His was the figure alluded to at the commencement of the present chapter.

He was the man creeping through the shadows of rock and pine, glancing now and then over his shoulder at the lights, or listening for the noise of a脚步声.

Lady Leone had evidently abandoned him to his fate. She had taken it for granted that he had descended like a falling bullet to the foot of the cliff, and that before the morrow's sun was high the soaring vulture would find the corpse of the nabob's detective.

Whenever Shasta Sid thought of these things he smiled revengefully. It meant something in the future.

If Lady Leone had lost him, he knew where to find her and he was satisfied.

He went back to the clump of timber in which he had left his horse; but the animal was gone.

Some one had come and taken the horse away, for the tether was not broken.

"I've walked before!" exclaimed Shasta Sid, turning from the spot. "I've fought more than one battle on foot and won, too."

He skirted the fringe of the basin and went back toward the Sunset trail.

"Halt!"

The ferret stood in his tracks.

The word seemed to pierce him like an arrow.

It was not a woman's voice that had spoken; but who was the person in the trail a few feet away?

"Hands up!" continued the same tones, and

Shasta Sid, who was totally unarmed, held up his hands with a smile of derision.

Then he saw the lion in the way; then he caught sight of the figure which, until then, had been hidden by the shadows.

A footstep came toward him.

"Ho! You, eh?" he heard in tones of disappointment.

"It's no one else," said the detective in reply.

Another step brought the mountain footpad still closer.

"I'll look at you with a light, stranger," said he, and forthwith a match flashed up in Shasta Sid's face, showing him the form and features of his opposer.

"My God!"

It was the footpad who let slip this ejaculation, and then his eyes became riveted upon the ferret with an intensity that was fierceness itself.

For a few moments the two men looked at one another without a word.

It was, indeed, look for look.

"Darn my skin! put it thar!" exclaimed the foot-pad, thrusting out his hand. "I'm glad to find you in the same business—hunin' somebody, as I know you are."

Shasta Sid hesitated.

He knew the man before him, but he seemed a being come back from the dead.

He was the third person whom he had sworn to find for Colonel Teton.

He had found Delle Paso headless in Echo Canyon, had unearthed Lady Leone, the nabob's enemy, and now he had run across the third person—Teton Sam, the man supposed to have met death among the lawless characters of the southern border.

And Sam knew him!

"Don't be afraid, Shasta," continued the foot-pad, still holding out his hand. "You've found me and that's what you promised the 'Frisco nabob you would do."

Shasta Sid dropped his yellow fingers into the extended hand and felt them encircled by fingers as yellow as his own.

The match had gone out, but the two men still looked at each other wonderingly and with strange thoughts.

"Let's go along the trail," said Teton Sam at last. "We can't talk here. I want to get beyond gunshot of the hive down thar. You remind me of a vulture, Shasta. Where you are, the quarry is pretty sure to be."

Shasta Sid shrugged his shoulders but said nothing.

Teton Sam led the way for nearly a mile over the trail, and when a very rough spot with high, almost perpendicular walls on one side had been reached, he turned abruptly upon the man who had kept at his heels.

"Well, you have found her?" he said.

Shasta Sid smiled.

"Do you think so, Teton?"

"I know it. What would you be doing here if you had not?" was the quick rejoinder. "Don't say no, Shasta. Don't tell me that you have not found—let's see: what shall we call her?—Lady Leone, the old name!"

There was no answer.

Teton Sam stood against the wall with his arms folded upon his chest. His figure was massive; his head large and well-poised, and his shoulders covered by the black hair which escaped from beneath his hat.

"Is the queen back yonder?" he queried, bending slightly forward.

"I don't think they call her so."

"She has a habitation of her own, though?"

"Yes."

"And the colonel? What of him now?"

Shasta Sid thought a moment before he spoke again.

If Teton Sam hated Lady Leone, what were his feelings toward the 'Frisco nabob?

"I never liked him. I guess you know that," he went on, coming to Shasta's rescue. "There were three of us once; but one has dropped out—Delle Paso."

Shasta Sid expected the sentence to end as it did. He nodded in spite of himself.

"And what's become of the girl?"

"Manon?"

"Manon."

"Oh, she grew up pretty and full of nerves."

"I thought so!" he exclaimed. "I always told—"

There he stopped like a man catching himself on the eve of letting out an important secret.

"Who does Manon look like?" he went on.

"I can only give you Colonel Teton's opinion."

"I want that."

"He says she resembles his worst foe."

"Does he?" cried Teton Sam.

"Ha! she must be hated by him for it!"

"There is no love between them; there never was any."

"By Jove! there can be none!" exclaimed the footpad. "It is impossible. Shasta Sid, I'm glad to meet you. Are you going to hand Leone over to the 'Frisco Croesus? Do you intend to take her to 'Frisco and deliver her up to the man whose curse she has been for more than twenty years?"

"I didn't come up here for that."

"But you are Monte Cristo Teton's ferret?"

"I don't deny what you know."

"That is right! I was dead once."

Teton Sam said this with an expression that was ludicrous.

"I was dead a long time," he went on. "Were you to ask the woman back yonder she would tell you that I am dead yet."

He stepped out from the rock, and his folded arms parted and dropped at his sides.

"How does Leone look?" he asked. "You've seen her, Shasta Sid."

"She is still handsome."

"Hers is a beauty that does not fade," commented the footpad. "She hasn't that beauty she used to have, but I'll bet my head she's a snorer yet."

He spoke half bitterly, with a bright, revengeful look in his eyes.

"You can't have her, Shasta Sid, unless you beat me!" he suddenly went on.

"What do you mean?"

"You can't keep your oath with Colonel Teton if that oath means the putting into his power of Lady Leone."

"I have told you that I am not expected to take her to 'Frisco."

"But you were to hunt her down, eh?"

"Perhaps."

"He pays you for that work?"

"He does."

"And weren't you to find Delle Paso, too?"

"It is likely that I was."

"And Teton Sam?"

"And Teton Sam!"

"I thought so! Well, you have found all three, Captain Sid. I wouldn't want a better trail-dog! Delle Paso is dead in the canyon. The Six Shadows of Shasta did that. You have discovered the band hated by the nabob in the 'Frisco palace, and I am here!"

Teton Sam fell back, and suddenly lifting his hand pointed down the trail.

"Go back to him!" said he. "Tell the Croesus in 'Frisco that I am living. Of course Manon looks like Lady Leone, the California tigress. The poor child can't help it! The blood is in her veins, and to discord it means death! If the nabob, your master, could see a certain other person—if he had his eyes about him when he looked, by heavens! he would have strange thoughts. But go! You can find Lady Leone; but you can't have her. Teton Sam stands between her and your Monte Cristo. If you want excitement, go and join the girl miner's Champions in Sunset City?"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NABOB CAUGHT.

WITH six human forms lying around the pole in the center of the square at Sunset City, there could be no permanent compromise between Crimson Clint and the mutineers.

They might acknowledge an armistice, but it could be nothing more than a breathing spell.

Blood had been shed; the tiger passions had found vent in the crack of the Winchester, and peace could not come without more hot work.

The cause of it all, Colonel Teton, the 'Frisco nabob, was disposed to stand his ground.

He had invaded Shasta Land to add a new bonanza to his great possessions, and to turn back now—to let Blonde Buck and his pards drive him away would be to lose it forever.

We saw him last face to face with Manon who had come unexpectedly upon the scene.

After the interview the girl walked from Captain Clint's house and left him alone.

"A thousand curses go with her, my child though she is!" exclaimed Teton. "She is the image of my bitter foe—the accursed likeness of the human tigress whose claws I see peeping out from beneath the velvet!"

He had gone to the window as if to watch Manon out of sight, but the girl had already disappeared.

Once more his thoughts went back to Shasta Sid.

What had become of his hound? Had he found Lady Leone?

He was still at the window when the door opened, and a moment later he looked into the face of Gold Gomez.

The second captain of the Philistines came forward immediately.

"Are you going to wait for them here?" queried Gomez.

"What do you mean?"

"Then, you do not know?"

"I know that there is a mutiny; that six men have already yielded up their lives—"

"Nothing more, eh?"

"I know, too, that Captain Clint will not compromise with the rebels."

A smile for a second illuminated Gold Gomez's yellow face.

"They are going to assume the aggressive," said he. "The tigers have had a taste of blood and are not satisfied. They want more."

"Whose do they want now?"

"Can't you guess, colonel?"

"Mine?"

"Yours."

The nabob did not lose color though his lips

met with a firmness Gomez had not seen before.

"Where is Captain Clint?" asked Gomez.

"He left me a short time ago."

"I can't find him in camp. Nobody seems to know where he is."

"What are the men doing?"

"The loyal?"

"Yes."

"They are waiting for the crash."

A short silence ensued.

"Some say I am to blame for this," suddenly said the man from 'Frisco, looking steadily at Gomez while he spoke.

"Well, what do you think?" asked the Philistine.

"There was bad blood here before I came. They wanted a pretext to rebel; my coming afforded them the opportunity. You see what they have done."

Gold Gomez smiled.

"I see," said he. "There was bad blood here. Where you find a community like ours you will find a good deal of that material. But if you had not come to Sunset there would have been no rebellion."

"The real head of the movement—the man who is more responsible than Blonde Buck—would not have kept peace much longer."

"Who is that man?"

"The doctor of Sunset City! The—"

Colonel Teton was about to say, "the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert," when he checked himself.

"We can't discuss the beginning of the mutiny here," answered Gold Gomez. "I thought to find Captain Clint at home, but I find you. There is yet time."

"Time for what?"

"For escape."

Monte Cristo Teton seemed to fall back a step. He looked strangely at the man who confronted him.

"I mean every word of it," continued Gomez, in all seriousness of manner.

"If I go, I play coward," replied Teton, like a man speaking through his teeth. "If I fly, I leave the rebels of Shasta to rejoice over their victory."

"But you'll be taking your life with you, and that's something," rejoined Gomez.

"True; but I would desert Captain Clint. I would turn my back on the man who has become my warmest friend."

"Very well," remarked the Philistine, falling back. "I have warned you. There is yet time. The secret way is yet open, and your horse will await you in the mountain."

Colonel Teton made no reply.

As Gold Gomez turned away he was followed by a sharp look.

"When will the crisis come?" asked the nabob.

"It is at hand now. You are not safe here. The loyal Philistines won't act without the presence of Captain Clint."

"You mean that they will not defend me unless under his eyes?"

"That is it."

"Then I can defend myself."

A contemptuous expression crossed Gold Gomez's face.

"Defend yourself against the human pack out yonder!" he exclaimed, pointing toward the door. "Great Heavens! Colonel Teton, did you leave your senses in 'Frisco?"

"On the contrary, I think I brought them with me," was the answer, couched in some bitterness.

"Then show it!"

Gold Gomez reached the door as he uttered the last word.

"Your mission has failed; we all know this," he continued, looking back at the man in the middle of the room. "You must know by this time that the Rattlesnake Mine can never become yours. You haven't gold enough in your coffers to tempt its fair owner again. She has passed that point."

"Thanks to the infamous hand that interfered, I presume!" cried Teton, flushing.

"I say nothing about that. I only know that your mission has failed."

"It has not failed!" And a step carried the 'Frisco Croesus nearly to the spot occupied by the man at the door. "I may have a mission of which you know nothing. I have a right to a secret or two."

"Certainly," smiled Gold Gomez. "Keep them, colonel."

He opened the door, looked again into the face so close to his, and was gone.

"Crimson Clint has not misjudged that man," muttered the 'Frisco schemer. "He knows whose hand blocked the bargain; he was seen to come back to Sunset City after midnight from the South. Where had he been? Who did he down there? The second captain of the Philistines must be watched."

Thirty minutes of silence passed away.

All at once Colonel Teton, watching from the window, saw a dark figure approach the house and disappear. It was followed by another and another.

"That means something," thought the nabob.

He drew back and took from beneath his coat a heavy six-shooter about whose butt he wound his fingers in a determined grip.

The room was full of shadows for the light was low, and the door through which Gold Gomez had departed was not locked.

Goaded forward by the spirit of self-preservation, Colonel Teton went to the door and locked it.

"That's better," thought he; "but if the rebels are out there and are determined to get to me, it won't effect much."

A strange and ominous stillness followed the click of the key in the lock.

Monte Cristo Teton, standing among the shadows in the room, with the revolver in his hand, waited for the next revelation.

Suddenly there fell upon the door a light rap. The nabob leaned forward and listened.

It might be a trap.

In a moment it sounded again.

"Colonel?"

The nabob was at the door.

"Who is it?"

"A friend."

The millionaire's hand went to the key, but it did not turn.

"What do you want?" he ventured next.

"I want to go inside a minute."

Was it a play by the mountain mutineers?

If he should open the door would he see the face of a friend?

"Just as you like!" resumed the person on the outside, in indifferent tones.

The words seemed to decide Colonel Teton; they turned the fatal scales.

The following moment the key clicked in the lock and the door opened.

No one was there; the man had gone!

A bitter curse formed quickly on Teton's lips.

He took another step forward and was about to look from the house when a voice that seemed to emanate from a spot within three feet of the doorway said:

"Now!"

In a second three figures leaped straight at him, and he was clutched before the revolver could be brought into play.

The nabob, falling back into the house, drew his captors with him, and he saw in the fitful light that prevailed the faces of three of Blonde Buck's mutineers!

Another man stood with his back to the door, and Teton saw the six-shooter he clutched in his right hand.

He had been duped.

He had failed to accept Gold Gomez's warning and was now the captive of the Shasta mutineers.

"Don't let us waste words," said one of the men, seeing the expression which had taken possession of the nabob's face. "You came up to make another yoke for us. You have failed."

They hurried him into the adjoining room, which was so dark that one of the four struck a match.

"Open the trap, Nevda," said one, and Teton saw the man addressed bend over a certain spot and seize an iron ring attached to the floor.

Then in the flickering glare of the lucifer he looked into a dark opening from which came a smell peculiar to a shaft.

They led him to the very edge of the dark place, and one of the men lowered himself over the edge and stood on one of the rounds of a ladder which seemed to lose itself in the gloom beneath.

"Go down, colonel!" commanded one of the others.

"Into that place?" exclaimed the nabob.

"Yes!"

"You dare not carry out the decrees of your council!"

"Who said anything about the council?" laughed the man on the ladder. "Come! we can't wait, Teton of 'Frisco."

Biting his lips until they bled, the nabob of California lowered his body over the edge of the cavern's mouth, and a second afterward he was going down amid pitchy darkness with a mutineer overhead and one below him!

CHAPTER XX.

DOCTOR DOC ONCE MORE.

THE ladder hanging along the perpendicular wall of the shaft swayed beneath Teton's weight.

At the end of it he found a second ladder similarly fixed in the gloom, and this he traversed in safety.

Not a word was spoken by any one until the nabob of 'Frisco found himself on hard ground again.

At the same time a hand fastened on his arm and he heard once more the same voice he had heard in Crimson Clint's house.

"You're down, Teton. Let us go on now."

He

Teton felt a puff of air on his cheek, and something glittered far ahead like a star on the horizon.

"They have conducted me underground—or through a part of Crimson Clint's mine—in order to get me beyond the camp in safety," thought Teton.

The following moment he was hurried forward again, and soon came out beneath the stars that seemed to mock his situation.

Several figures came forward from a clump of bushes and the nabob saw that one of the faces wore a mask which effectually concealed it.

"Ah! you have him, I see!" exclaimed the masked personage, addressing Teton's captors, and while he spoke he leaned forward and showed the Californian a pair of eager and victorious eyes.

"Bring up the horses!"

It was the same person who issued the command.

Before Teton could speak three horses were brought forward and he was led toward them.

"By heavens! I protest against this treatment!" he cried drawing back. "This is infamy and coolness without a parallel."

"I thought so!" laughed the hidden face. "We can't stop to listen to protests. Mount the prisoner, men!"

His surroundings showed Teton how useless would be both protest and resistance. He was pushed up to the horse, and in a jiffy was seated in the saddle while quick hands were fastening him to the steed with ropes.

The masked man had already mounted and was watching the proceedings with evident relish.

Monte Cristo Teton wondered when his absence would be discovered.

He wondered, too, if Crimson Clint's "loyal" adherents had not winked at his capture; if they were not in secret league with the rebels, and if they would follow him for rescue even at the Philistine's command.

Possibly, after all, Gold Gomez's warning was a sham, a mere subterfuge played for the purpose of discovering his condition.

He knew that Crimson Clint suspected Gomez of treachery. Was it not correct?

When the manipulators of the ropes had completed their task he was securely bound to the steed.

His hands were lashed to his back, but he could sit bolt upright or lean forward on the horse's neck.

At a signal from the man in the mask the three horses went down the trail together.

The hidden face held the bridle-rein of Teton's steed, with the other rider on the other side, and for some minutes the trio kept on without an exchange of words.

Monte Cristo Teton eyed the masked man with searching curiosity.

There was a familiar shape to his figure as it was displayed in the saddle, and his voice seemed to have a sound which reminded him of one heard before.

"I have him!" mentally exclaimed Teton, at last. "I see through the game they are playing. I did not guess wrongly when he came to Crimson Clint's house and found me there." And he looked at Hidden Face again with more steadfastness than before.

"What are you thinking about, colonel?" suddenly queried the mask, turning upon him with an abruptness that made him start.

"About your ride long ago," answered Teton.

"You haven't forgotten it, then?"

"No; nor have you."

A laugh stirred the dark folds of the mask.

"I'd like to know how one could forget a ride like that," was the reply.

Teton thought he heard teeth grind beneath the hood. He had noticed that since the beginning of their conversation the companion on his left had fallen back, and that he was alone with Hidden Face.

They were riding side by side, their boots touching now and then for an instant.

The man in the mask kept silence for a little while.

"I know what you are thinking about, Doctor Doc," murmured Teton, while he watched him. "The Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert cheated the vultures. I know it now. I wanted to finish you at the outset of your ride, but a hand interfered. Never mind. I shall not grieve; but I will watch my opportunity and take it when it comes."

"You've become a nabob?" resumed Hidden Face, looking at the prisoner.

"You ought to know."

"For tunc has smiled on you, but yet you are not satisfied."

"Where is the man who is?"

"True!" laughed the Mask.

"You always wanted more. If you had this planet you'd want another."

"That used to be your ambition."

"Mine?"

"Yours."

"Well, perhaps it did. I want to talk, Colonel Teton."

"Go on."

"You beat me in the first game we ever played together. You know how you did it."

That infernal ride in the burning sun and under the wolfish vultures of the desert was the fruit of your victory. We happened to see beauty in the same face. A woman is mixed up in every case, eh, colonel?"

There was no response.

"Nita was the most beautiful creature I ever saw. You were of the same opinion," continued Hidden Face. "What business had I to love her—and a penniless prospector whose discoveries always turned out failures? You were at the beginning of your career then. Everything you touched turned to gold and stuck to your fingers. But somehow or other, Nita thought something of the prospector. Maybe his perseverance attracted her; or his face, for he had a passable face, and a good figure. Maybe something of this kind attracted her, I say."

"To the devil with such talk!" broke in Colonel Teton. "I'll acknowledge that Nita did think something of you."

"Thanks! She may have told you so afterward."

The last word was spoken with an emphasis that did not escape Teton's observation.

"Well, I went down into the Devil's Desert," resumed Hidden Face. "I went toward its heart lashed naked to a horse, and at the mercy of sun and vulture. Let the story of that awful journey remain my one dreadful secret. Not for all your millions would I recall it in words to-night. There have been Mazeppas before that day; there have been many since; but their aggregated sufferings can not approach mine.

"I came up out of the mouth of that sandy sunburnt hell alive," the speaker's teeth met again. "I cheated sun and vulture; I baffled the jealous vengeance of the man who started me on that ride—coming out of it all with a future before me. You were content with Nita—the beautiful prize of our game. She was the bride of the Nabob of 'Frisco—the companion of the man who had sent a rival across the desert of death. Don't tell me that she was happy. I don't want any falsehoods, Teton!"

"By and by a child came—Nita's child and yours. It was born in a storm and when you took it in your arms for the first time you saw at the window the face of a woman known then, as now, as Lady Leone."

Colonel Teton started.

"You confirm my words!" laughed Hidden Face who had observed the start. "You knew Leone before the night of your child's birth. I would like to know how many lives you have crushed in your games for wealth. You put the new-born child down and sprung to the window; but the face was gone. The next moment a wild cry from the bed startled you and you turned to see your wife sitting bolt upright with a stony stare directed at the window. She, too, had seen the apparition which had blanched your cheeks. You went to the bed and helped Nita back to the pillows; then you made a terrible discovery. Nita was dead!"

A brief silence fell between the two men at this juncture.

"The babe began to grow," said Hidden Face when he resumed. "It at first showed some signs of resembling its mother; but all at once you discovered that it had the stamp of Leone's beauty. In a single night, as it were, the change took place. The child went to sleep resembling Nita and awoke the image of your life-long foe."

In Teton's silence Hidden Face could see the colorless face and the welded lips.

"The older she became the more she looked like Lady Leone," he went on. "More than once you felt like strangling the child in her crib, and once you went to the nursery for that purpose and found Manon playing with her maid.

"Time passed; you grew richer and Manon developed into beautiful womanhood, but with that beauty which you hated set in her face and figure like a stamp of fatality. Did you ever think, Teton, that the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert was being avenged in this strange resemblance?"

"No!" exclaimed Teton. "To tell the truth, I thought but little of you all this time."

"Thought me dead, eh?"

"Of course," snapped the 'Frisco nabob.

"What would you have given if Manon had looked like Nita?" queried Hidden Face.

"Millions."

"You hate the girl now."

"Yes, because she has the face and, I think so sometimes, the blood of Lady Leone! That woman has been the curse of my life. Her fellow-conspirators, Delle Paso and Teton Sam, are dead, but her hand is still at work."

"You've lately felt its power, eh, Teton?"

"I have. It came between me and the mine back yonder."

"Between you and Stella's bonanza?"

"Yes."

"It lives to baffle you—that hand does. I am playing my own game. I have nothing to do with Leone, the tigress—nothing beyond beating her if she interferes with my vengeance. Manon has followed you to Sunset. Her hated face is back there. She has Leone's nature as well as her looks. Do you know that the girl

had a lover before she was three hours in camp?"

"No!"

"She had."

"What care I?" he laughed. "Then I will now get the tiger-blooded beauty off my hands."

Hidden Face looked back at the man who was riding on Teton's left several lengths behind his horse.

"Colonel Teton, I think I could startle you," said he with a grin. "I need not remove my mask to show you who I am. There is but one Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert, and he is the person now called Doctor Doc. But let me whisper a sentence—just one."

The doctor's palm dropped upon Teton's leg as he bent toward him, and their gaze met.

"There isn't a drop of your blood in Manon's veins!" he whispered.

If he had not been tied to it, the Nabob of 'Frisco would have fallen from the saddle!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WARNING BY THE KNIFE.

THE doctor of Sunset City and his prisoner were galloping over the mountain-road, when a man stole into the camp and went straight to the cabin until lately occupied by Colonel Teton.

It was Shasta Sid, the man who by a miracle had escaped from a fall over the mountain precipice from which he had stepped, under menace of Lady Leone's revolver.

He halted at the door of the shanty and opened it.

It was dark inside.

"Colonel?" asked Shasta Sid, stepping inside.

There was no response.

It did not take the nabob's ferret long to discover that he was the only person in the shanty at the time.

Shasta Sid stood for a moment mystified and alarmed.

What had happened since his departure on Leone's trail? Or was Monte Cristo Teton absent at Crimson Clint's house, or elsewhere in the camp?

After awhile he went out and sought some information.

"Ho! back again!" exclaimed a voice, at sound of which he turned and looked hard at the speaker.

"I am back," he replied, discovering that he had met one of the Philistines.

"A little too late for the fun."

"What fun?"

A stride brought the man closer.

He took Shasta Sid's arm in a familiar manner and led him away, saying:

"To my shanty first."

A minute afterward the mountain trailer entered a cabin which fronted the square, and in the light of a lamp on a bracket saw his companion lean against the logs and look him over from head to foot before he spoke again.

Then it was that he heard the story of what the reader already knows in detail; how the rebellion had broken out; how Blonde Buck's Winchesters had littered a little spot in the square with dead men, and how Theo had received what was supposed to be his death wounds at the hand of Captain Clint, the Philistine chief.

Shasta Sid listened like one spell-bound to this narration.

"Where is Captain Clint now?" he queried.

The narrator shook his head.

"What has become of Colonel Teton?"

Then it was that he thought he detected a singular glitter in the eyes before him.

"He knows," thought Shasta Sid. "Will he tell me?"

"I doubt if you could find him," answered the Philistine, watching the human ferret like a hawk.

"Is he in Sunset?"

The man hesitated a moment and then said:

"No."

Shasta Sid started forward with a gleam of tigerishness in his eyes.

"They have taken him off!" he exclaimed.

"They have laid secret and violent hands on Monte Cristo Teton! Let them beware!"

"Do you mean that?" smiled the Philistine.

"I do!"

"This is Philistia."

"I know it."

"We are in power!"

"We?"

"We, the rebels, as they call us," grinned the man, though he spoke with earnestness. "This southern nabob came among us with a yoke—a golden yoke, at that. We have worked in one a long time; we have been Captain Clint's slaves without a murmur; but we won't serve the gilded Mammon from 'Frisco!"

Shasta Sid could not help eying the Philistine while he spoke.

"They have abducted my master, said he.

"As you like, Captain Sid," was the reply.

The mountain Vidocq advanced toward the door.

"Are you going to look for him?" queried the Philistine.

"I am!"

"Alone?"

"Alone!"

"You take in your own hands the life you love. I have no doubt you are a brave man, Shasta Sid. Brave men sometimes do rash things."

"You fellows—you Philistines—will baffle me, eh?"

"I have not said so."

"I can read the eye and pick up a hidden link in speech now and then."

The Philistine's retort was a laugh.

The winds from the hills on the west blew on Shasta Sid's cheeks when he went outside.

He had left the giant figure of the Philistine against the wall, and a glance back into the shanty showed him the same figure where he had left it.

"Gone, is he?" thought the nabob's sharp. "A cloud has discharged its storm since I went away. Colonel Teton is the wedge that split the Philistines of Sunset. The mutineers have seized Teton. He is somewhere in their clutches. But where?"

The question seemed to echo strangely in his inmost soul.

"I must know more!" exclaimed he. "I must pick up the trail. Somebody can give me a clew. Some one must do it!"

Not long afterward he found himself watching a figure that touched the outside of one of the houses while a pair of eyes seemed to be looking in at the window alongside the little door.

Shasta Sid kept in the shadow of a neighboring shanty and watched.

"It is a woman's form," he murmured. "It is Stella's? If not hers—whose? Not Leone's?"

In a few minutes he found that it was neither.

The figure left the cabin suddenly, moving away in a crouching manner and as noiselessly as a retreating leopard.

"Good! it is Manon!" cried the Shasta ferret. "Manon in Sunset City? What does it mean?"

He sprung after the girl whom he overtook near the line in the earth, and, a moment later, he stood face to face with her.

"Don't question me," exclaimed the girl. "You have no right. He says I look like Lady Leone! He once crept into the nursery to throttle me because of that resemblance. Let him assist himself! I am Manon! I have tiger blood in my veins and it is hot now."

The girl turned away.

"They have carried him off," said Sid.

"Have they?"

"You knew it."

"What if I did?"

"You did not try to interfere?"

"No."

"You don't care how your father's career ends?"

Manon came toward Captain Sid.

"I don't care!" she fiercely returned. "I look like Lady Leone—ha! ha! Don't forget this for a moment, Captain Sid. You are his hound; he has sent you to her trail; but, instead of the tigress, you have found Delle Paso, whose bones lie behind a boulder in Echo Canyon. They have taken him! There are men even here who will not wear a yoke, though it be a golden one."

"Did you see me at the window of your cabin?" she went on, pointing toward Theo's abode. "Go back to its window and look in. She is nursing him yet—on the wrong side of the divide at that. What does it mean, eh? Let Theo get well and see!"

"I care nothing for the loves of Theo and the bonanza queen," replied Sid.

"For Colonel Teton, then, is it?"

"Yes."

"Ah! follow the Philistine trail, and find him—if you can!" laughed Manon. "He will never come back. The Nabob of 'Frisco will never play another card for the gold-mine of Shasta. He has vanished."

"Didn't he resist?"

"Where was the use of it?" answered the girl. "The coolest head in Sunset sprung the trap."

"Was it on Blonde Buck's shoulders?"

"Hal do you know that he leads the rebellion?"

"I know who commanded the eight Winchesters."

"It was a cold-blooded affair. I don't approve of it," said Manon. "They are lying over there yet—six of them, in the moonlight. No, the cool head I mentioned is not on Captain Buck's shoulders."

"On the doctor's, then—on Doctor Doc's?"

Manon started.

"Why do you guess him?"

"I've been here before," rejoined Sid. "I have kept my eyes open. I know something of the past."

He found the eyes of Manon fixed wonderingly upon him.

"I don't want to know the past—not now at any rate," said she. "I am mixed up in it somehow. My life is not the only one that has become entangled in the net of mystery—a net of dark mystery at that. The girl back there—Stella—is beautiful. She doesn't look like Lady Leone—not she!—that is, not if I look like her. Go back and see how she bends over the wounded Philistine."

"No," returned the Shasta ferret. "I have other work ahead."

"The finding of the lost nabob?"

"That is my mission."

"Then, follow your trail. Crimson Clint is also missing, but he went away of his own accord. Booted and spurred, the captain of the Philistines rode from Sunset. Don't ask me if he has abandoned Teton to his fate. If he has, after espousing the nabob's cause, he is a coward!"

Manon fell back from before the Shasta shadower, and he saw her send a swift glance toward the cabin.

"I hate her!" she exclaimed, covering the lighted window with her finger.

"Why, Manon?"

"Because I can't help it! I look like Lady Leone and you know who she is. Besides, if I had Stella's face I might be happy to-night; but nature stamped me with a countenance that is a curse. Don't you believe it? Ha, ha!"

Sid found himself alone in the soft starlight that bathed the mountain camp in a weird beauty.

"A strange creature and one brought into these parts by fate," said he. "She not only looks like Leone the tigress, but—"

What he would have said was never spoken, for at that moment something dropped at his feet with a sharp sound.

Looking down he beheld a knife, from the handle of which fluttered something white.

The next moment the detective tore loose the bit of paper attached to the buckhorn handle.

The knife itself he flung away.

Captain Sid walked down the shanty-lined street to a spot beyond the last roof; then, among the shadows of rock and tree, he struck a match and held it over the message, for such it was.

The writing was rough and bold, like the person who must have penned it.

He read thus:

"The Sunset capital can dispense with the presence of the slave, as it has dispensed with that of the master. A word to the wise is sufficient."

"THE LEAGUE."

"The League, eh?" exclaimed Sid, eying the signature at the bottom of the warning. "The mutiny has become a league. I see it," and coolly pocketing the paper and throwing his match to the ground, he looked back at the cabins and scowled.

"Not now!" he cried. "I have other work on hand. But by and by I'll take up the challenge. I can play tiger as well as ferret. I'm at home in either role. You don't know me, men of Sunset."

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EYE TO BUSINESS.

THE knife which Shasta Sid had flung away lay for a few moments where it had fallen; then a man came from among the cabins and took possession of it.

He was evidently its owner, for he chuckled to himself as he thrust it into his belt and went back to the shanties.

"Did he get it?" asked a man who joined him there.

"Don't it look like it?" he answered, tapping the handle. "No paper here now, Jubal."

"I see," grinned the other. "The slave will not defy any one. He knows better. Besides, the absence of Monte Cristo Teton relieves him of his yoke. Which way did he go?"

Toward the hills on the west."

"To read the paper and to act with discretion. Captain Sid wants to keep his head where it is."

Meanwhile the mountain ferret had come back to Sunset.

He stood again among the cabins of the Philistines, looking not at the light showed him where Stella nursed Theo, but into another window and upon the giant figure of Blonde Buck, the head mutineer, and a companion who, while he listened to the leader, twisted the ends of a sandy mustache.

"The man of the Winchesters!" ejaculated Sid. "The six over yonder in the square owe their fate to him; and yet retribution holds back. What are the 'loyal' doing? Why don't they bury or avenge their companions?"

Blonde Buck had spread out before him on the rough table over which he leaned a badly-drawn map on yellowish paper.

The detective saw his finger move across the surface as if following the windings of some stream marked down thereon, and his companion watched that finger as if his life depended on his faithfully doing so.

"Here I say it is," said Captain Buck, at length, looking up into the face above his own, and at the same time his finger paused.

"Couldn't you have reached it by a straighter trail?"

"I could have taken the crow's course."

The watcher nodded.

"I say I think it is there," he looked at his finger on the map. "Let me tell you a story."

"Go on."

The sandy sport fell back from the table and assumed a restful position.

"Colonel Teton wasn't always what he is now," continued Blonde Buck. "A good many

years ago a man known as Gulch Gideon was one of the best known characters in the whole Southwest. He had the face of an Adonis and the daring of a devil. Rich? Not rich as riches went there and then. He had a head for cunning and hands always ready to carry out what it planned, and these things were worth more than a gold mine.

"Gulch Gideon fell in love with a girl. She had the figure of a sylph and the face of a seraph! Gods! but Nita was a picture! Well, as was natural, she had more lovers than one, and Gulch Gideon, because of his face and figure, had more than one heart set upon him. It was natural, you know."

The listener nodded.

"I was inclined a little toward Nita myself, ha, ha!" continued Blonde Buck. "But I knew enough not to cross a hand like his. The girl didn't love him, though—not then, at least. She had fixed her affections on a good-looking prospector who came to us one night with the fever, and whom she nursed back to life."

"The prospector was smitten from the first, and did not discover that Gulch Gideon had preempted his claim long before he found it. We all knew what was coming, but said nothing to the prospector, preferring to let him take matters as he met them. Nita showed her preference by giving Gulch Gideon the cold shoulder in a manner that settled the love affair tragically.

"One night that prospector disappeared. Nita said that he had taken his departure; that he had left the border forever. It was so sudden that we did not believe the story. The prospector threw up the fight for a pair of eyes like Nita's? The thought was preposterous. We let it go, however. Gulch Gideon left us, six months later, taking with him Nita, whom he had won by his persistent and overwhelming wooing. From the day of his departure to this hour the camp has never looked upon the handsome sport's face. What became of him? I'll tell you."

"A few years later there rose into a certain kind of fame in 'Frisco a man called Teton. Everything he touched seemed to turn to gold, and one fortune after another rolled into his coffers. He had one child whose mother died when she was the smallest mite of a babe—fell back dead, it is said, at sight of a face at the window of her bedroom. She was the Nita of our old camp, and her husband, the Gulch Gideon, was Monte Cristo Teton now. Such is one of the many episodes in that man's career."

"Whatever became of the prospector?" asked Blonde Buck's companion.

"I looked for that question," smiled the captain of the mutineers. "I thought you would let it slip. He never came back to us; but the vultures and the sun didn't finish him."

"The vultures and the sun?" echoed the other.

"Yes. They took turns at him, but failed to accomplish their purpose. In short, Jubal, he was sent across the Devil's Desert. You've heard of that?"

"I have."

"Well, he crossed its border line lashed naked to a horse and blindfolded. Gulch Gideon knew how to deal with a troublesome rival; and the prospector rode away—to death as he thought—at his bidding."

"Why didn't he take vengeance?"

"He bided his time."

"Did it ever come?"

"Not until within the past few hours."

Jubal's look was a question.

"I startle you, do I?" queried Blonde Buck, for the first time since commencing his story taking his finger off the map before him. "Yes, the long-awaited-for time came awhile ago. Monte Cristo Teton is now the prisoner of the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert!"

"Then Doctor Doc—"

"Yes, Doctor Doc!" interrupted Captain Buck, the eyes of the pair, watched by Captain Sid on the outside, meeting as he spoke.

"Then there is no chance for the Nabob of 'Frisco!"

"Not one in a million!"

Having spoken thus Blonde Buck went back to the map on the table.

"I think it is here," said he, covering the same spot again. "Here runs the creek with the steep banks, and at this point, where it makes a sudden turn, you will find the old mine. Jubal, I want to know what has become of Monte Cristo Teton; I must know. There is in this game a million or two for us if the right cards are played at the right time. Doctor Doc wants vengeance. He will subject Colonel Teton to a fate worse than the one to which he once consigned the prospector. I have led the rebellion against Crimson Clint who has abandoned his friend and his own followers to their fate. I can become nabob here and rule this whole camp, Stella's side included, with an iron hand in less than three months. But Teton must come back. The Midas from 'Frisco must be made to feel the power of Captain Buck; he must be placed under everlasting obligations to me, you see, Jubal."

The listener bowed.

"Let me show Monte Cristo Teton that there is in Sunset a hand as powerful as Crimson Clint's,

as strong as Doctor Doc's, as persevering as his own spy's, and I have the game. The old mine will give us the first trick. You must go to it."

"When?"

"Now!"

Jubal bent over the table and studied the map.

"Don't let a trail mislead you," continued the captain of the rebels. "There must be no failure. You will find the hoof-prints of three horses on the right trail, but all three will not continue to the mine. Doctor Doc and his captive will probably make the last part of the journey alone. Here, take the map with you. Keep it in your bosom and on no account let yourself be despoiled of it."

Blonde Buck folded the old map in its well-worn creases and handed it to the man at his side.

"He is there," he resumed. "Monte Cristo Teton has gone to the Monk's Mystery. Its exact location is one of Doctor Doc's secrets. Long ago, and while he was biding his time, he prepared Gulch Gideon's doom. There is in the unknown heart of that old mine a death-trap too terrible to think of. Let me save Monte Cristo Teton from its jaws and my fortune is made."

"But Doctor Doc?"

Blonde Buck laughed.

"I'll risk the rage of the Esculapius of Sunset!" said he. "Find the man from 'Frisco first."

"I will find him!"

Shasta Sid drew back from the window.

"Does Manon—the nabob's child in camp at this moment—resemble Nita, her mother?" he heard Jubal ask.

"Heavens, no!" exclaimed Captain Buck. "There's another woman in the case; she came on the stage years ago; and Manon is her living image. Strange, don't you think, Jubal?"

"It is strange."

"They say the devil's hand is in it," grinned the captain of the rebels. "The girl is a beautiful tigress, with some sharp claws under the velvet. I like 'snap'; by Jove! I do!"

He lay back in his chair and twisted his moustache.

"I know what I'm after, Jubal!" he suddenly went on. "You have a mission before you. Look out for Doctor Doc, and, perchance, for that hired hound who has obeyed every beck and call of his nabob master."

"Shasta Sid?"

"Shasta Sid!"

Jubal burst into a derisive laugh.

The map had already disappeared in his bosom, and his shirt had been buttoned over it.

"I've never missed a mark, captain!" he said, leaning toward the rebel chief with fire in his eyes.

"I know it, Jubal. Don't break the record now."

The next moment the man with a mission left the cabin, passing so close to Shasta Sid that the ferret could have touched him!

CHAPTER XXIII.

TWO WOMEN.

THE morning of the next day broke calmly over Sunset City.

As the long arrows of daylight, streaming above the horizon, showed the cabins once more, a door opened and Stella came forth.

There was a look of mingled hope and pleasure in the mine-queen's eyes.

It indicated that the man on the cot behind her had taken a step toward recovery despite Doctor Doc's diagnosis and wishes.

Theo's eyes had followed her to the door, and would have kept track of her further if the portal had not prevented.

Stella sent a glance toward the square where the six victims of Blonde Buck's Winchesters had fallen; but they were there no longer. At the last moment, and just before daylight, the bodies had been removed and one common grave in the mountain burying-ground held them all.

The girl-Croesus crossed the dividing line and entered her own territory.

Keeping on apparently noticing no one, though she was observed by many, she proceeded to her own house where she found seated her mine boss, the Tall Redwood.

"I saw you start," said the man with a smile, "and I thought I would wait for you here."

"You've done well, Captain Redwood."

"How is he?"

"Better. Theo is going to beat death this time."

"I'm glad of that if he is a Philistine," was the reply. "We don't like the gang anyhow, but mebbe Theo's a mite better than the rest, and we might stand *him*. Captain Clint's gone, eh?"

"Yes."

"And the 'Frisco nabob?"

Stella started.

"What! gone back to his palace?"

A broad smile overspread the Tall Redwood's face.

"Don't you know?" he exclaimed. "Whar have you been all night?"

"With Theo."

The circumstances that surrounded Monte Cristo Teton's departure indicate that he didn't

go back to 'Frisco. He went away with Doctor Doc."

"With that schemer?" cried the girl.

"With no one else."

"Not willingly, Captain Redwood?"

"Of course not. They took him down the shaft beneath Crimson Clint's house, and thence through the mine to the mountains. The mutineers have gained their point; they've corralled the nabob."

The fair mine-owner of Shasta was silent for a minute.

"He'll never come back," continued the Tall Redwood.

"Not if he has fallen into Doctor Doc's hands," was the response.

"Do you know his past?"

"Some of it."

"Do you know why he hates Colonel Teton?"

Stella crossed the room to one corner which contained a heavy chest.

Throwing back the lid, she took from the chest a few pages rudely sewn together and covered with rough leather.

"You have never seen this, Captain Redwood?" she queried, coming back to her overseer.

"No," answered the man.

"I found it three months ago," resumed Stella. "It seems to be a disconnected story of some one's life."

"Doctor Doc's, eh?"

"I'll let the book answer that."

Stella placed the book in the miner's hand and went to the window.

The leaves were few in number, and the bronzed fingers of the Tall Redwood turned them as he mastered the faded chirography which covered the pages.

Stella let him have all the time he wanted.

At last a cry from the man at the table called her from the window.

"This is the most remarkable story I ever read!" exclaimed he.

The girl smiled in response.

"It is the attempt of a man to keep fresh in his mind some indignity which he has sworn to avenge some day."

"I think so, Captain Redwood."

"In no place on these pages appears the name of any man; but in spite of this omission I read names between the lines."

"Ah!"

"Doctor Doc's name is there, and the name of his enemy as well. That enemy is the Nabob of 'Frisco, and the man who has bided his time all these years is now his jailer."

The girl came close, and placing her hand on the table bent down until her soft cheek almost touched her overseer's red beard.

"It is the vengeance of a man who had a right to take it," said she. "Fate brought Colonel Teton and Doctor Doc together at last, and one is now the other's captive. He will not spare him, Captain Redwood!"

"Does the hawk spare the mouse upon which it pounces?" grinned the overseer. "It catches to kill, so does Doctor Doc of Shasta Land."

"Which way did they go?"

"What! do you want to follow?"

"No; but I have a curiosity."

"They took the trail which leads toward the Monk's Mystery, or toward the region where it is said to be. The doctor and his pard will come back alone."

Stella picked up the book which had fallen from the Tall Redwood's fingers and turned to one of the last pages.

"What does this mean?" she asked, covering a certain sentence.

The miner read aloud:

"He thinks he is the parent of the child he hates—the child who resembles his bitter foe—the southern tigress."

"What does it mean?" and the Tall Redwood's eyes met Stella's gaze when he looked up.

"It mystifies me. I have read it a thousand times. Manon claims to be the nabob's child; he owns her. She grew up under his roof. But at the same time she is hated because she is the living image of one Lady Leone, who is Colonel Teton's bitterest enemy—bitterer yet than Doctor Doc."

The miner's eyes wandered back to the diary but he said nothing.

"The girl could not explain that sentence were she to see it," continued Stella. "They say that Colonel Teton's wife was a gentle creature with dark blue eyes, and without a particle of the tiger in her nature. But Manon! look at he!"

"All tiger!" laughed the Tall Redwood.

Stella returned the lost diary to the chest, and five minutes later found herself in the little office near the mouth of the Rattlesnake Bonanza.

The door behind her was an inch ajar.

Immersed in the examination of a map which she had taken from a tin box, she did not hear the foot of an approaching person nor see the form that appeared as the door opened.

A minute afterward other eyes than hers were studying the map from above her shoulders, and were following her finger as it was moved from point to point.

"I won't follow!" exclaimed Stella aloud. "Let Doctor Doc have his way. If the story in

the diary be true he has suffered much at the hands of the 'Frisco Midas; and if he can cheat Leone out of her revenge he shall answer to her."

"That is right!"

The girl Croesus of Sunset looked up with a cry.

Above her were the handsome face and blazing eyes of Manon Teton!

The nabob's child had fallen back a step and stood erect with her hands clinched and every nerve quiver with the intensest passion.

She looked like some beautiful fiend fresh from the molds of vengeance.

"That is right, I say," continued Manon in the same strain. "Let Doctor Doc answer to Leone for what he does to the California nabob."

"He is your father," answered Stella.

"They tell me so," was the reply. "But look at me, and then look at him. Have I his face? Ah! you have never seen a portrait of his wife."

"I never have."

In a second, as it were, Stella felt a picture thrust into her hands.

"That is Nita!" cried Manon. "That is a portrait of the woman who is called my mother. Do I resemble her? No, I am the counterpart of Lady Leone. I have her face, her figure and her blood! Yes, her blood, I tell you!"

Stella gazed at the portrait for several minutes. It was that of a beautiful woman with eyes of the softest blue, and a sad though captivating smile on her fine face.

While she looked she was watched half-tigerishly by Manon whose bosom rose and fell with a passion which seemed to be devouring her.

When Stella handed the picture back it was almost snatched from her hands.

"My mother? ha! ha!" laughed the nabob's child. "Do we look alike? I wish I could show you a portrait of Lady Leone."

"Who is Lady Leone?"

"The woman who came between Colonel Teton and yourself before you could complete the bargain for the sale of this bonanza. Don't say no, Stella of Sunset! I have not invaded Shasta Land blindfolded. Lady Leone's hand broke the bargain, and yet you ask me 'who is she?'"

"I am honest," said Stella. "Lady Leone is a mystery, even to me. I have never seen her."

Manon's look in an instant became a stare.

"Swear it," she cried, clutching the girl miner's arm. "Swear to me, if you dare, in the presence of God, that you have never seen Leone, the tigress."

"I swear," answered Stella solemnly.

"Now look at me. In face, in figure, and in tiger blood I am Lady Leone. And Monte Cristo Teton's heir as well. This is strange. It mystifies you; it has puzzled thousands. He stole into the nursery once to strangle me because of the resemblance. Leone has kept in the background; but she has not been idle. She let him know from time to time that she had not forgotten. I heard Colonel Teton and his ferret Shasta Sid in their secret conferences. I picked up a life history link by link until I had nearly all. The nabob's detective found Delle Paso hanging headless from a stirrup. He was Lady Leone's husband! The detective never found Teton Sam, Leone's right-bower; but I believe he has discovered the avenger herself. She is in this region because she came between the bargain and the delivery. Where is Lady Leone, Stella of Shasta?"

The lips of the mine-queen seemed to meet in refusal.

"I am a huntress," continued Manon. "I must know where this woman is. I want to see whether I am her living counterpart. She stayed your hand; she kept Colonel Teton from getting a grip on this bonanza, and you know from whence the message came."

"You must let me have one secret," replied Stella at last.

"Not that one!" exclaimed the nabob's child. "I came to the mine for it. I will not go hence without it, or something else!"

There was a spark of fire in the eyes that glared at Stella, and before she could stir or lift a hand to ward off the inevitable, the heiress of millions leaped forward with uplifted dagger.

"The secret or your life!" rung through the little office, and the queen of Sunset was pushed against the wall with a hand at her throat and a blade in her face!

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE MYSTERY'S SHADOW.

"The secret or your life!" repeated Manon with the same fiery emphasis of the first demand, while she held Stella to the wall and saw the results of her terrible clutch in the darkening face and bulging eyes.

Already the queen of Shasta had passed beyond the power to reply, but the maddened woman who confronted her did not seem to realize this.

"I have the blood of Leone in my veins, they say!" cried Manon. "I feel it in my fingers. Doesn't it burn your throat, my gilded lady?" And she laughed while her grip tightened more and more.

For some time Stella had ceased to struggle. She had become a dove in the eagle's talons, and Manon had but to loosen her hold to see her drop limp and lifeless at her feet.

The nabob's heir bent over the lithe form stretched on the stone floor of the office and looked at her without a sign of pity.

"It was her fault," she said aloud. "She might have prevented all this by telling her secret."

Manon turned to the tin box which still occupied the table at which she had surprised her victim.

The next moment she had dipped her fingers into it and taken out a paper.

"The girl is rich!" ejaculated Manon, folding the paper with a glance at its contents. "I don't wonder that the Rattlesnake Bonanza lured Monte Cristo Teton to the heart of Shasta Land. I don't care for her wealth."

She looked into paper after paper, glancing now and then at the form at her feet, but bestowing no pity upon it.

"They'll find her by and by," she murmured, leaving the table at last. "That is what a secret-holder gets. She might have suspected when I told her whose blood is said to be in my veins."

Manon extinguished the girl queen's lamp and left the mine office in darkness.

She passed down the corridor to the entrance and emerged into the broad light of day.

No one seemed to see her quit the place, and not long afterward she entered the cabin which Blonde Buck had generously secured for her upon their first meeting.

An hour later a man coming from the depths of Stella's bonanza opened the door of the office and touched something with his foot.

He stooped and felt the smooth, cold face of the woman he served.

A match soon broke the gloom and the Tall Redwood looked down into Stella's eyes.

"Ah! struck!" exclaimed the miner bending lower. "Whose work is this?" and he lifted Stella and held the match so close to her skin that the flame seemed to touch it.

Instead of working with his mistress there he carried her, not back to her abode but back into the mine, stepping carefully in the dark until he reached a chamber whose heavy mills for crushing quartz underground proclaimed its uses.

"There's a spark here!" said Captain Redwood, beginning his work, and by and by the eyes got life again and the Shasta Queen seemed to come back from the dead.

Eagerly did the Tall Redwood question her.

Who had met her? Whose hand had been at her throat?

The girl shook her head.

She was like one who comes out of a wild dream with confused thoughts.

She could tell nothing.

"I found you unconscious on the floor of the office," persisted the miner. "There were finger marks in your throat. A hand had been there. Can't you tell me whose?"

"I cannot," answered Stella. "I remember going to the office. I see myself looking at the map in the tin box; beyond this there is nothing but darkness."

"It is singular," mused the Tall Redwood.

"It may come to me by and by; but we must let it go for the present."

Captain Redwood did so reluctantly. He speculated in vain. Stella sealed her lips in a strange manner and looked at him saying nothing.

"Now for a confrontation," thought Manon who saw Stella pass her window on her way back to Theo. "She holds the secret yet, and knows that my hand has been at her throat. If I had used my dagger I should be safe now. But let her attempt to get even. Try it, Queen Stella! I shall not retreat a step. I would disgrace Lady Leone if I did."

But Stella did not bother the nabob's heir.

She found Theo not alone.

When she opened the door she beheld a pair of well-shaped shoulders above the young Philistine's cot, and she stopped immediately and stared at them.

Her entrance had been heard and the following moment the head set firmly on those shoulders turned and she saw Gold Gomez with his swarthy face wearing a puzzling smile.

"He's going to make it," remarked Gomez.

"I told them so the moment I saw him," answered Stella. "A man doesn't have to die because he is shot."

Gold Gomez stood erect.

This was the second captain of the Philistines; the man who had fetched from Lady Leone the message that had baffled Monte Cristo Teton in his attempt to add another bonanza to his list.

No soft words had ever passed his lips in her presence; but she had not watched him in vain. She knew, as well as if he had thrown his heart at her feet that he had hoped to become the husband of the Queen of the Mines.

"I don't want Theo to die," said Gold Gomez, after returning her inquisitive look for a second. "Captain Clint's shot was in cold blood. We've had war and death enough here. I want the

line in the sand wiped out. It has cost too many lives."

"I meet you more than half way," answered Stella quickly. "Captain Gomez, we should not be tigers, but human beings."

"But there cannot be peace while Champion and Philistine exist," was the retort. "It is impossible."

"There shall be no Champions. Can you say that for the Philistines?"

Gold Gomez hesitated.

"I can not."

"I thought so," and Stella smiled faintly. "You can't speak for Blonde Buck and his men. When peace comes we will obliterate the deadline; but until then it must remain where it is."

Gomez passed to the door.

Halting there, he looked over his shoulder and caught the gaze of the Mine Queen as it was riveted upon him.

She came forward and they left the house together.

"Shut the door, please," said the Philistine.

"Now," he went on, when Stella had obeyed, "I can say it without him hearing me. I am going away."

"You?"

"Yes."

"After Captain Clint?"

"No. What care I for the Philistine coward?"

"Coward?" echoed Stella.

"What else is he? He left Colonel Teton to his fate! He fled to escape the hand of the man who played his card against the Nabob of 'Frisco. Monte Cristo Teton had the better memory. He recognized Doctor Doc, which Captain Clint failed to do, though he saw him every day. When he had the mystery solved—when he saw in the doctor of Sunset a man who had been biding his time, with none of his thirst for vengeance abated—he fled. Then the lion sprung upon the 'Frisco Croesus. Doctor Doc has in his power now the great enemy of his life. Years have not broken the force of his hatred, nor weakened his power. If he has his way, the career of the gold king of California ends in a terrible doom. As I have said, I am going away."

Stella did not speak.

"I am not blind," continued Gold Gomez. "I've had my eyes open, and wide open at that, during the last few days. Crimson Clint's pistol has finished the work!"

He looked straight into the girl's eyes while he spoke the last sentence; he caught the flush that reddened her face.

"That's answer enough," he went on, with a smile. "I've been a fool—a lagging fool. Maybe, after all, there never was a chance for me. I don't growl. You know what kind of blood I have in my veins. I'm part Mexican—just enough to spoil the whole, I reckon. I may see Leone. What shall I say for you?"

Stella's thoughts came fast.

"Tell her that I shall hold the mine to the end," said she. "Say that Monte Cristo Teton has fallen into the power of an enemy who came back from the dead, as it were. Tell her all you know about it, and don't forget the woman who boasts of her resemblance to her."

"I'll forget nothing—if I see her," and Gold Gomez put out his hand. "There's a deep mystery about that woman, and it will come out by and by. Did you ever think, Stella, that you are in the shadow of that secret?"

The girl Croesus seemed to start.

"I have thought a great many things," she answered, evasively.

"But there is one thing which I'll wager my head you never ventured upon"

"What is that?"

"Not now," laughed Gold Gomez.

In an instant her hand was at his sleeve.

"I will not. The time has not come for it," he continued stubbornly.

"The keeping of it may imbitter my life."

"Dismiss it."

"After what you have said? I cannot!"

"Think of it, then."

The second captain of the Philistines drew back from Stella's grasp.

"Good-by," smiled he, touching his hat. "A love untold sometimes dies soonest. Take him!" he looked toward the cabin. "When there are no Champions and no Philistines there will be no dead-line. Look out for the tiger-blooded girl from 'Frisco—the seraph who has heired the nabob's millions and Lady Leone's soul."

The next moment Gold Gomez was walking away, followed by the gaze of the girl-miner until his well-made figure had disappeared among the shanties.

"He is right," thought Stella. "I am in the shadow of the mystery. Heaven knows when and how I shall come out of it."

She turned back into the cabin and one look at the cot drove every vestige of color from her face.

Theo, the young Philistine, no longer lay where she had seen him last.

He had fallen headlong from the bed, and lay on his back on the floor with the stare of death in his fixed eyes.

Stella went forward with a shriek.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CHAMBER OF HORRORS.

We go back to the nabob.

We saw him last riding with Doctor Doc over a trail which seemed with each successive mile to go deeper and deeper into the weird, wild heart of the mountains.

The reader will readily recall the startling words with which the doctor of Shasta blanched his prisoner's face, and caused him to fall back as far as his bonds would let him with a look of horror in his eyes.

"There isn't a drop of your blood, Colonel Teton, in Manon's veins."

Such words were enough to suddenly unnerve the California Croesus, and for some distance he rode in silence while he stared at the man at his side.

"Say that again," he said at last, and with a grim smile Doctor Doc repeated his words.

"I would like to believe that, for the girl has the accursed face of my bitter foe. She looks like Lady Leone, the tigress; she has her voice, her supple movements—in short, she is the counterpart of that creature, and bears no resemblance to Nita, my wife."

The doctor of Sunset let Colonel Teton go to the end of his speech without interrupting him.

It seemed to afford him great pleasure to watch him talk.

Having spoken thus, the nabob rode on in silence.

The horses covered a good deal of ground before he spoke again.

Doctor Doc bent forward and guided his prisoner's steed into another trail, when the man who had been following came up and looked at him for orders.

"You haven't told me enough, yet I don't like to ask for more," said Teton at last.

"Not my child?"

"Did I say that?" smiled the doctor.

"You said that her veins hold none of my blood."

"That is true."

Colonel Teton looked puzzled.

"Let us move faster," added Doctor Doc. "We will never get there at this gait," and the horse went forward faster than before.

An hour later the scenery changed.

The trio crossed a little basin completely encircled by mountains.

The moonlight lay softly everywhere, revealing very small objects to the three men as they moved along, and once across the basin, they again beheld the lofty peaks of a great range.

Colonel Teton looked up at them, and studied them wonderingly for a few minutes.

"My fate lies yonder," he said to himself. "Doctor Doc and his party are taking me to the shadows ahead. There the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert will attempt to carry out his scheme of vengeance!"

The mountains seemed to swallow up all three.

All at once Doctor Doc sent a swift glance toward his follower. The man instantly drew rein and then came to a halt.

Monte Cristo Teton looked down at his own bridle rein, and saw the hand of the Shasta doctor there once more.

They were now moving forward alone, the doctor's friend having remained behind, probably to guard the mouth of the canyon, which they were traversing.

Beyond the gulch they were compelled to walk their horses over a narrow pathway littered with broken stones. This continued for some time, when the rocky way ended, and the trail, instead of trending away on a level, seemed to descend into the bowels of the earth.

The canyon walls appeared to meet over their heads as they advanced; the moonlight was shut out, and Colonel Teton, looking up, saw no stars to tell him that there was not a roof above them.

"Ah! here we are!" exclaimed Doctor Doc, looking at his prisoner.

The nabob saw nothing to indicate that they had reached a prison.

Doctor Doc dismounted and cut the straps which secured him to the horse.

"Get down, colonel," said he, and the next moment the Nabob of 'Frisco stood on the ground once more.

He felt the hand of the Shasta doctor at his arm.

"Come," spoke the doctor. "We will complete the journey afoot."

Monte Cristo Teton was led forward, the path descending still, until he knew that he was breathing the air of an underground chamber.

The darkness prevented him from seeing anything, but the hand was still at his arm and he did not resist.

He was taken some distance into the place before a halt was made or a word spoken.

All at once a match flashed in his face, and he saw the doctor of Shasta once more.

Doctor Doc stepped aside and lit a candle, which seemed to protrude from a hole in the wall.

"I'm at home," he said, with a smile, as he turned upon Teton.

The man from 'Frisco looked round him.

He saw the lofty ceiling of a cavern in several places; he noticed how strangely smooth the

walls were, as if dressed to this condition by the hands of expert slaves.

The floor beneath his feet was hard and glittering, like a bed of polished lava.

He did not look behind him, therefore he could not tell how far the cavern extended in that direction.

"You will make yourself at home here," resumed the doctor, when Teton had inspected the place a few seconds. "Let me release your hands," and the same knife that had cut him from his horse severed the cords at his wrists.

"This place is your home forever, Colonel Teton," the surgeon of Shasta went on, his voice growing suddenly bitter. "The Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert has prepared it for his old enemy. I have bided my time, but I have not been idle. When I saw you ride into Sunset City I knew my hour had come, and that the chamber of doom would receive its inhabitant. You won't want for light. Beneath the wax candle in the wall sits a box full of them. Each one is good for twenty-four hours."

"Then I am to die of starvation!" exclaimed Colonel Teton.

"No. That death were too easy for the man who sent me down into that infernal furnace of sand where the vulture follows the doomed till the end comes. Starve you to death, Monte Cristo Teton? Not for the world! Follow you wall and you will find plenty to eat. When I am gone, take the candle from its socket and explore your grave."

Colonel Teton seemed on the eve of throwing himself forward and upon the man who confronted him; but a glance at the band that hung at the doctor's side showed him the gleaming barrel of a six-shooter.

He kept his place.

"From this place there is no rescue, no escape," solemnly proceeded the Shasta surgeon.

"The man who dreams of freedom here awakens to find himself forever imprisoned. This is better than the Devil's Desert. No burning sun reaches this spot; there is no sky, and, consequently, no hungry vultures. The sand does not blister your eyes here, and the hot dry air does not scorch your cheek. You are ever in shadow; but it is the merciless shadow of death."

Colonel Teton's lip seemed to curl haughtily.

"If I had known this," said he, "a dead man would have played Mazeppa from the start!"

"No doubt!" laughed Doctor Doc.

"You will hear no words of fear from my tongue. No plea for mercy shall pass my lips in your presence."

"That is right. None fell from mine when I looked ahead and saw nothing but the sun shining upon a waste of sand."

Colonel Teton did not reply.

"Now, farewell," continued the doctor, stepping back. "Some day some one may penetrate this place. A thousand years hence footsteps may echo in this tomb, and a hand hold a light over a lot of bones. Where you stand a skeleton may lie—grinning at the dark wall overhead, and telling in its ghastliness, the doom of the millionaire-tough of California! You robbed me of Nita, and I, after long years, plundered you of that treasure which no man will sell at any price—his life!"

The last word seemed to be thrown back with a thousand weird echoes from the walls that surrounded them, and the following second Doctor Doc disappeared so suddenly that the floor at his feet seemed to have opened and swallowed him.

Colonel Teton went toward the front of the chamber as if he would leap through the entrance into the unknown space beyond, but the opening suddenly became as solid as the wall itself, and he knew that the door of doom had shut!

He went back to the candle and carried it to the portal. Then he beheld a door of iron which fitted closely in a frame of massive rock; the flaring light showing him how useless would be the strength he might exert against it.

"We should have sent him dead as well as blindfolded across the desert," said the nabob, falling back from the cheerless inspection. "But never mind. The tables may turn despite the seeming hopelessness of my situation. Shasta Sid yet lives, and he has found more hidden trails than mine. My bronze trail-hound will ferret me out and make that door yield to his powers."

Colonel Teton passed the candle's socket with the light in his hand.

He had resolved to explore the tomb—to see how far it extended, and to get a peep at the food which Doctor Doc had left him.

He found the wall as smooth as glass, and, following it for fifty feet, came suddenly upon a large box in the lid of which were a dozen holes.

Monte Cristo Teton saw at the same time the fastenings of the box, and his curiosity prompted him to throw back the lid.

As the heavy wooden lid banged against the wall a singular noise greeted the nabob's ears.

He bent over the open box and lowered his candle.

"My God!" he cried, staggering back, his face blanched and lifeless. "I spared a demon when I spared the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert!"

He had seen enough to chill his blood and to horrify him beyond description.

The interior of the box seemed to be a nest of writhing rattlesnakes! The noise they made was, to the Nabob of Frisco, most infernal.

As a gigantic serpent sprung almost erect and straight at him, he recoiled and dropped his candle.

In another instant he was enveloped in darkness, and in imagination saw the snakes escaping and crawling over the floor.

"The world, if I had it, for a clutch at your throat, Doctor Doc!" he cried. "You have starved the snakes waiting for me. This is the vengeance of a demon; but there shall come a day of retribution!"

He did not move for some time.

For a second he thought of going back and shutting the lid of the serpent cage, but his courage failed him.

Suddenly something touched his foot, and then crawled slowly across it.

He held his breath until the thrilling sensation was no longer felt, then he found his way to the wall and reached the box of candles.

Striking a match he held it over the box and was about to select a candle when something rattled near his hand.

He went back again with a shriek of terror.

A rattlesnake was coiled on the ground at his feet.

There was death in its poised head and glittering eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A NEMESIS AND A TRIGGER.

MEANTIME the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert had gone back to the companion he had left on guard some distance from the dungeon of serpents.

"Let us go back," said he, showing the Philistine a triumphant face as he leaned toward him. "We may be needed in Sunset."

The men gathered up the reins and a moment later were galloping over the same road which they had lately traversed with a prisoner.

Doctor Doc no longer wore the mask which for awhile had concealed his features from Colonel Teton.

His dark eyes seemed to glitter with victory.

"There is still another," the guard heard him say, like a man speaking his thoughts aloud. "He should be with the Frisco Midas at this hour. But I will find him. The long lane has turned for one of them; it will turn again," and the doctor of Shasta lapsed into silence, from which his companion failed to rouse him by a sudden touch.

"I hear a horse!" exclaimed the guard.

Doctor Doc looked half-madly at his comrade. The two steeds stopped and became statues in the trail.

"There!" whispered the Philistine again.

The avenger threw back his head and looked up at the dark rocks above them.

"This is Echo Region," he remarked, after a moment. "We hear strange sounds here. What you may have heard must have been the sounds of our own going."

"But we are quiet now," was the response. "The horse I heard is still on the move."

"By Jove! I hear it, too!"

Doctor Doc could not keep back the distinct sounds of a steed's progress which greeted his ears.

"What does it tell you?" he queried.

"The horse is on the trail above us."

"I think so."

"It must be directly overhead now."

At that moment the full moon which hung like a silver shield in the heavens was shining on a certain spot directly above the two men.

As they looked up their gaze fell at the same moment upon this spot, and both saw come into view the figure of a horse.

"It is there!" whispered the guard. "What did I tell you, Captain Doc?"

The surgeon of Shasta said nothing, but stared at the apparition, with one hand at the butt of his revolver.

He saw that the saddle was occupied by a figure strangely garbed for that time and place, and shading his eyes that he might see better, he watched it with breathless curiosity.

"By the gods! it is a female!" suddenly whispered his companion.

Doctor Doc, who at that moment had arrived at the same conclusion, looked at his comrade with a smile.

"She does not see us, though; we are in shadow, and the eye of a hawk could not find us here."

"You are right. But these mountains have betrayed us by the echo. I did not know they were inhabited by a creature like that."

"Let us get better acquainted."

"How?"

"Let me slip back and up the trail. I can creep up on her under cover of the rocks at her right. A near view might solve the mystery."

"Go."

Doctor Doc's friend slid from the saddle and vanished.

"There is one woman who would like to find Monte Cristo Teton," mused the avenger. "She

has harbored her revenge longer than I held mine, but she has not been as successful. Burt may get a look at her face. He may solve the mystery that envelops the figure up there."

Burt, the Philistine, had already disappeared.

He went back over the trail, keeping in the dense shadows of rock and tree, and stepping like a leopard.

Finding the right place he began to ascend the side of the hill.

Now and then he was compelled to draw himself up by means of shrub and vine, but he progressed without noise.

Every now and then he looked over his shoulder and saw the blended figures on the trail.

"Doctor Doc's friend, no doubt!" chuckled Sunset Burt. "In a little while I will see her as she is."

He reached the trail in which stood the steed of the unknown.

Halting there for breath he crept toward her, keeping still in the shadows.

At last he crouched within a rod of the strange creature.

He had crawled the last ten feet with the patience of a snail.

"Gods! I wish Doctor Doc could see her!" he exclaimed as he looked at the rider of the giant steed, and saw her fine figure and handsome face. "There are not many like her in California, and my head for a football, if she isn't a creature with a mission."

Sunset Burt wanted a nearer view.

He crept toward the unknown, keeping his eyes fixed upon her.

All at once the statuesque figure stirred.

Sunset Burt saw the woman's hand move toward her horse's neck, and then, before he could divine her intentions, he found a revolver pointed at his head.

He had been discovered, and the unknown had let him crawl within range, watching him when he thought her looking upon the trail below.

"I see you, Sir Spy," he heard a voice say.

"Stand up! There! now forward!"

A strange thrill ran through tough Burt's frame.

Doctor Doc could not see him from where he sat on his horse, therefore he could not come to his rescue.

Covered by the six-shooter, Sunset Burt went forward.

"Don't show the white feather," laughed the woman. "Come on!"

A minute afterward Doctor Doc's comrade stood within a few feet of the person who had been watching.

"Not the man I thought you were; but never mind," said she. "Who is down below?"

Sunset Burt hesitated.

"This is no child's game! I want the truth."

"My companion and I are going back to camp."

"Back to Sunset?"

"Perhaps."

She bent toward her prisoner and looked at him sternly for a second.

"You haven't changed much since you left Tuxedo after the scrap with the two Mexicans," she suddenly said.

Sunset Burt could not repress the cry that bubbled to his lips.

That this unknown creature should recall one of the most thrilling scenes in his career was both strange and startling.

"I haven't forgotten the two Greasers," said he; "but I don't know whether I have changed or no."

"You haven't been back to Tuxedo since, eh?"

"No."

"You can go back without fear. The episode has been forgotten."

"The spared Mexican?"

"Don Leo? He is dead!"

"Killed by some one?"

"No; he killed himself."

"So much the better!" laughed Burt.

"Now let us come back to business. Your comrade down there—What do you call him?"

"Doctor Doc."

Sunset Burt spoke before he reflected.

"I thought so," answered the woman, quickly.

"Is he still on the trail?"

"The trail has ended."

The man from Sunset could see the unknown start.

"Ah! he found him, then?"

Sunset Burt held his tongue like a person who discovers his mistake.

"You have answered me," resumed the woman. "Doctor Doc has found his old foe. The spider doctor of Shasta has found use for his web at last. The golden fly was a long while getting into the thrall, but he is there now, eh, Sunset Burt?"

"You think so," snapped the avenger's companion. "I am willing to let you have your way."

"Where is the fly?"

It seemed to Burt that the hand at the revolver got a new grip.

"I don't betray anybody," he replied.

"Oh! one of the faithful!" smiled the person in the saddle. "How do you wish to go back to the doctor—dead or alive?"

There was a cool malignity about the query

that sent a chill through the tough from Sunset.

He was standing near the edge of the trail, and a bullet in the brain would send him over and down to the man who waited for his return.

This thought flashed with lightning rapidity across his mind.

"I see," said the woman. "You want to go back dead! You won't tell where the fly is. You won't betray Doctor Doc's mountain web. Very well, Sunset Burt. Men have sealed their doom before your day."

"You would make me a traitor to the best friend I have!" he cried.

"You prefer to keep a little secret and give up your life."

"I can't tell you what I don't know."

"Pish! You can't hoodwink me by strategy of that sort!" was the quick retort.

"He did not take me all the way. Do you think Doctor Doc would trust the whole scheme to another?"

"Why not to you, if you are regarded faithful? Where is the fly?"

Sunset Burt's lips met white and resolutely before he spoke again.

"I can beat this woman. She will carry her game so far and no further," he thought. "She will gain nothing by killing me. Is she the female foe of Colonel Teton—the woman sometimes called Lady Leone? She can be none other."

The man from Sunset dramatically opened his shirt and suddenly exposed to the woman's gaze the flesh above his heart.

"I give you a target," exclaimed he. "I have told the truth. I was not permitted to go the whole distance with Doctor Doc and his prisoner."

"You went how far, then?"

It looked like Nemesis in the saddle was weakening.

Sunset Burt thought he could play a new card and be a little independent.

"I don't know the country hereabouts," answered he.

"Not when you have made it your stamping ground?" echoed the woman. "Come! Sunset Burt. A lie is a dangerous thing just now, and here!"

The Philistine laughed.

"Very well. You may take your secret down to the man who waits!" the woman exclaimed. "Right about!"

With a smile of derision the Philistine turned to the edge of the trail.

"Forward!"

He looked over his shoulder at the occupant of the saddle.

Did she mean it?

Her face was sternness itself.

"Forward!" she repeated.

Sunset Burt saw himself covered by the revolver as Shasta Sid had been before him.

"It is the shortest route to Doctor Doc," continued the same voice.

"What! will you play unbeliever and fool?" he heard a moment later, and then a jet of fire leaped at him from the muzzle of the leveled weapon, and he tottered for an instant on the very brink of the trail.

At the same time a cry of horror followed the report of the revolver and when the smoke lifted the trail was clear.

And far below Doctor Doc was bending over something which had come down from above—a dead man.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SERPENT AT HOME AGAIN.

THROUGH the warm sunshine of the day which followed the night of adventure, the doctor of Shasta rode alone into Sunset City.

The little camp showed no traces of the excitement through which it had passed, and no one seemed to take more than a passing notice of the avenging surgeon of the hills.

There was on his face a singular admixture of victory and rage.

He had dealt with Colonel Teton, but his companion, Sunset Burt, had been sent to his last account by a woman's bullet.

Doctor Doc went straight to his little cabin, where he was soon joined by the captain of the mutineers—Blonde Buck.

The big master of the rebellion showed his eagerness before a word parted his lips.

"Was the prisoner troublesome?" he queried, watching Doctor Doc narrowly while he spoke.

"As tame as a kitten," smiled the avenger.

"Did he recognize you?"

"After a time."

"Suddenly?"

"Somewhat. He caught me first by my voice, I think, although he had discovered before last night that the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert had not provided the vultures with a banquet."

"And he is safe now?"

Did Doctor Doc notice the anxiety that accompanied this question?

"He is safe," he answered in a manner that did not altogether satisfy Blonde Buck.

"How did he meet his doom?"

"As you might expect him to—like Gulch Gideon."

The captain of the rebels—the man whom we have seen send Jubal after the golden nabob in order to successfully play a deep-laid game of his own—looked disappointed.

"Will Jubal find nothing, or discover a dead man in a trap?" he mentally asked himself. "Has Doctor Doc destroyed the Nabob of 'Frisco, thus baffling me before I can play my first card? I had not counted on a disaster like this."

"How are affairs here?" asked the doctor.

"The Loyal as they call themselves have made no move. The six dead men are buried, and Crimson Clint has not returned."

"Has he deserted for good, think you?"

"It looks that way. At any rate, as you know, he deliberately abandoned the nabob."

"The girl—"

"Manon?"

Doctor Doc smiled. It was plain to him which of the two women was uppermost in Blonde Buck's mind.

"Ah! is the beauty here yet?" he queried.

"She is."

"Does she know about the capture?"

"She does."

"And she says—what?"

"It has not melted her to tears," grinned Blonde Buck.

"I thought so," was the answer. "That girl is a strange mixture of blood. She does not resemble the man who calls her his child."

"No; she says she is the living image of the nabob's female foe—the counterpart of the woman who calls herself Lady Leone."

The Shasta doctor bowed.

"Did you ever see Leone?" he questioned.

Blonde Buck appeared to start.

He probably thought: What is this man coming at now?

"I may have seen the woman. I have seen a great many in my time," he answered evasively and with a quiet smile.

"There is nothing in this—for us, Captain Buck," said the doctor.

"Ha! you sly old fox, there is more in it than you let on," thought the captain of the mutineers.

"Where is Stella?" suddenly asked Doctor Doc.

"From Eve to—Eve!" mentally ejaculated Blonde Buck, and then he replied:

"You will find the girl where you left her—with Theo."

A cloud darkened the doctor's brow.

"The young man has had a sudden change," added Blonde Buck.

"For the worse?"

"For the worse."

A light which was easily seen lit up the depths of the doctor's eyes.

"Tell me," said he.

"The girl found Gold Gomez, the half Mexican, bending over the cot. Five minutes later Gomez had said 'good-by,' and was on his way from camp. When Stella went back into the shanty she found Theo on the floor with death in his eyes."

"The hand of Gomez!—the yellow hand of the Greaser sport?"

"It looks like it; but there has been found no traces of poison."

"A fox like Gomez knows how to conceal his tracks. Will Theo die?"

"The chances are against him."

Doctor Doc made no reply, but Blonde Buck seemed to read his thoughts without the help of his tongue.

"I must see him," remarked the Shasta doctor.

"If you wait till Stella sends for you professionally, I dare say you will wait some time."

"I will not wait for that."

Five minutes later Blonde Buck, looking from his shanty, saw the figure of Doctor Doc moving toward Stella's abode.

"He'll find his match there," he laughed to himself. "The queen of the mine knows the fox and all his tricks."

Long before the doctor of Sunset reached the cabin a pair of eyes were riveted upon him.

"The shadow has come back," murmured Stella, sending a glance toward the low bed at one side of the little room.

"What is it, Stella?" asked the young man, who had caught her look.

The girl crossed the room with a quick stride and bent over the speaker.

"No words; be quiet!" she said, in a low voice. "Some one is here. Let me talk with him, Theo."

There was no reply beyond a look of acquiescence and a glance toward the door.

The following moment Stella, with a strange gleam of eagerness in her eyes, opened the portal and stood face to face with the avenging doctor, who touched his hat with the hand which a few hours before had closed the iron door of doom upon the Nabob of 'Frisco.

Doctor Doc crossed the threshold, seeking out the figure on the cot with his searching eyes, but looking quickly at the queen of the mine.

"Is he better?" he asked.

Stella by a quick movement placed herself be-

tween Theo and the doctor as though there were death in the shadow of the malignant schemer which was falling athwart the young Philistine's bosom.

"He is better," she replied, returning the doctor's gaze with one that perplexed him.

"He has been worse?"

"But he has come out of the shadow which struck him down."

"Doctor Doc—"

In an instant the girl's hand swooping downward like an eagle closed on the patient's wrist, and their eyes met.

Theo smiled and looked away.

The doctor of Shasta saw this and thought:

"There is no doubt of it now. The card I should have played has been held back too long. These people are lovers, and the bullet of Crimson Clint is the thing that has united their fortunes!"

He encountered the girl-miner's gaze as she looked up.

"Did he resist, Doctor Doc?" Stella asked, and while the Shasta surgeon was framing a shrewd reply, she dropped Theo's wrist and bent forward.

"It is no secret in Sunset," she went on. "Indeed, we know it all—the surprise at Captain Clint's house, the trip down the swaying ladders and through the mine. It was cleverly done. There! you need not answer if your ride with your prisoner is sealed with the seal of secrecy."

"It is," said the doctor. "Monte Cristo Teton will never make you another offer for your bonanza."

"Thanks to the vengeance which has not slept for many years?"

There was no reply.

"You have dealt with the master," continued Stella. "The spy has not been silenced."

"Shasta Sid?"

"Shasta Sid!"

"I am able to cope with the mountain ferret!" exclaimed the Shasta doctor. "Think you that the hand which smote one is not strong enough to smite the other? This man will turn from his mission. He will go to other fields; he will hunt another master."

"Do you think so?"

"If he should not, let him play against me!" cried Doctor Doc.

"I have no advice," answered the girl, quietly. "I have a patient here," and she looked down at the eyes which were fastened upon the plotting face of the mountain doctor.

"Go, Doctor Doc," exclaimed Theo, before he could be restrained. "There is coming a day for all of you—a day for summing up and reckoning."

Stella gave the young Philistine a reproving look; but she seemed to have lost her power.

"Doctor Doubleface, you have too many irons in the fire!" continued Theo, pushing the girl's interposing hand aside. "I have seen through your game from the first. You prophesied my death from the moment of my coming here with Captain Clint's bullet in my body. If I had remained in your care I would now be with the dead six on the mountain. Go back to your prisoner. Another is playing against you. You laugh at the slave! You say you fear not the yellow-faced trail-hound of the 'Frisco nabob. You laugh at the hand of Shasta Sid. Look out! Doctor Doc, even now the tables are turning. There is a hand in the shadow; but it will not remain there long."

Both Stella and the doctor of Shasta listened, spellbound to the words as they followed one another over Theo's lips with a prophetic utterance that seemed to clothe them in the mantle of truth.

"Gold Gomez did not touch me with the secret and invisible dagger of his people," Theo suddenly went on. "I know what the camp thinks. The yellow sport was found here in this house when Stella came back. His lips were close to my ear. Like many of us, Gomez had a secret. He was sharing it with me ere he went away. The second captain of the Philistines is no poisoner. He is a better man than you, Doctor Doc!"

Stella uttered a cry and bent over the speaker with not a vestige of color in her cheeks.

"Let him go on, girl!" almost hissed the Shasta doctor. "The boy knows that I will not strike a dying person."

"Hear him!" smiled Theo. "The Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert is the pink of forbearance!" And while the speaker laughed, the doctor turned toward the door and walked away, leaving the echo of a mad and vengeful curse behind.

The girl Croesus of Sunset said nothing, thrilled into silence.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WITCH OF MONK'S MYSTERY.

ARMED with the map which had been intrusted to him by Blonde Buck, Jubal set out on Doctor Doc's trail.

The Philistine knew the Shasta country, with its many dark places and wild and winding paths.

It was his duty to find and rescue the 'Frisco nabob, if the doctor's vengeance had not finished him.

The captain of the mountaineers was playing a game of his own, and Jubal, as he went down the road recently traveled by the Californian and his captors, did not have to wonder much what it was.

Jubal was shrewd and penetrating.

It was not the first time he had played traitor, though never before had he received a commission to find a lost millionaire.

If he had seen the watchful eyes at the window of Captain Buck's cabin while they (the captain and himself) discussed the chances, he might have had some misgivings as to the success of his mission; but Shasta Sid had eluded discovery, yet had not failed to catch every word that passed between the pair.

Jubal was well mounted, and went over the ground at a rapid gait until he was far from Sunset.

Once or twice he drew rein long enough to examine the map by match-light, then secreting it in his bosom, resumed his journey.

Morning broke again and found Blonde Buck's spy and champion at the edge of a little basin, beyond which rose the rough hills of Shasta Land.

"The canyon is beyond the valley," murmured Jubal. "The caverns are there, and in many places I shall find fine dust, which will betray their tracks, if they have left any here."

Across the basin and among the mountains he found a winding gulch, so dark that it seemed to be roofed with solid stone.

More than once he dismounted and searched the trail with a match which he shaded with his hands.

"Nothing yet," said Jubal. "Not the sign of a foot-track have I found, though I am near the spot which Captain Buck covered with his finger."

He led his horse by the bridle from the scene of his last halt.

All at once he gave utterance to an exclamation which he could not suppress.

His searching match had revealed something at last.

Jubal held his breath and bent lower.

In the dry dust in the middle of the gulch trail, and between two stones, was the thing that had astonished him.

It was a woman's footprint.

Jubal, of Sunset, stared as he had never stared before.

There it was, with the rows of nails clearly defined, and the whole impression so plain that it seemed to have been taken in wax.

"Whose track can it be?" asked Captain Buck's spy. "Manon is not ahead of me. I left her in camp, and, besides, having been raised in 'Frisco, she knows nothing of this region."

The longer Jubal stared the deeper grew the mystery of the track in the dust, and a dozen times before his match went out did he count the prints of the nails.

"I'm all at sea about that track!" he exclaimed, quitting the spot at last, and a minute later he resumed his hunt, abandoning his steed at length and crawling among the boulders, with his revolver loose in his belt.

After a while the mountain ferret made another discovery.

He found more foot-tracks, but larger than the ones which had first startled him.

"The doctor and his prisoner!" exclaimed Jubal. "I am on the right trail."

Twenty minutes after Captain Buck's spy stood in Stygian gloom.

He had crept into a cavernous opening, and by means of a rope which he had not neglected to bring along, had lowered himself to the spot he occupied.

"If he is in this devil's den of darkness I will find him," resolutely muttered Jubal. "Doctor Doc was once seen in this region with a pack-horse and a lot of tools. What was he doing but preparing a prison for the man for whom he was waiting, like a spider in his web?"

Jubal felt his way deeper into the gloom by the wall at his right.

He followed the windings of the corridor, pausing every now and then to listen to the faint echo of his own footsteps.

Jubal had explored caves and mines before, but not that nest of darkness.

All at once the ferret-tough came to a halt.

A light was moving ahead of him.

It rose and fell like the gleam of a will-o'-the-wisp, and fascinated Jubal, who watched it as he never watched a light before.

"I'm not alone in this place," thought he, drawing his revolver. "If it is inhabited by demons, as seems likely from what I see, I am apt to have an adventure before I get out."

He leaned against the wall, and drew off his shoes; then, with his eyes fixed upon the light, moved on again, but without noise.

Jubal of Shasta used his ears for all their worth.

He could see the moving light but could hear no sound, and finally there stole over him the chill of the supernatural.

"To the devil with the idea!" he ejaculated, trying to rid himself of the feeling, and the next moment he crouched at the foot of the wall which he had been hugging and tried to make

out what seemed the outlines of the bearer of the mysterious flame.

"By the gods! a woman!" exclaimed the Shasta spy.

This discovery bursting suddenly upon Jubal's vision had entirely taken his breath.

The light lifted unexpectedly had shown him the figure of a female—a woman with a darkly beautiful face and large piercing eyes.

"The counterfeit of Manon, but not Manon!" continued Jubal. "If we did not know that she was the nabob's child and that her mother died long ago, I would believe that her mother stands before me now."

The strange woman who had been holding her waxen taper near the ground rose as Jubal finished and he saw the trimness of her figure, and more of her than he had seen before.

He did not stir but hugged the wall with his gaze fastened upon the apparition and with his fingers still wound firmly about the butt of his six-shooter.

The woman turned suddenly and left the spot. Jubal instantly followed.

"The witch of the old mine will lead me somewhere," thought he. "Doctor Doc could not bring Colonel Teton to this place without her knowledge. After all, I'm in luck!"

Suddenly the light came back.

"My God!" burst from Jubal's throat.

He went to the wall again and would have forced his body into the stone if it had been soft enough.

Sure enough the woman was moving toward him.

How Jubal watched the light as it came searching out the dark places and dissipating the shadows of the corridor!

Discovery was inevitable.

He ground his teeth while he glared at the candle. His brain was full of conflicting thoughts.

Once he thought of seizing the woman by the throat and choking her into revealing the secret which he believed she held.

He carried this thought so far as to put up his revolver for that purpose; but before the bearer of the light came within reach of his hand he changed his mind.

"I have it!" thought he. "If I remain here I am sure to be discovered. Why can't I capture the witch and force her to tell me what she knows about the mine at the muzzle of the revolver?"

It was a thought that fairly thrilled Jubal.

The six-shooter filled his hand once more, and again, with wolfish eagerness, he watched the progress of the light, and laid his plans as it approached.

His tall figure against the wall was enough to frighten the most courageous. He looked like a mad man in ambush for a foe.

"She comes forward like a snail!" said Jubal. "My fingers itch to clutch her wrist. I'll send 'em to the bone the first grip!"

On came the unknown woman with the taper.

All at once the hand of Jubal, which had been resting on his hip, left his body and went back to the wall as if for a spring.

In another second he would be seen.

"Now I have her!" he mentally exclaimed. "The game is mine!"

Out went the hand, straight as an arrow to the wrist he eyed so savagely, and the next instant a cry awoke the echoes of the spot.

The woman fell back the full length of the Philistine's arm, but despite her terror she did not drop the light.

Jubal's fingers seemed to sink to the bone, and while he held his captive firmly, eye met eye in a language not to be understood.

"Who are you? One of his enemies?" asked the woman.

Jubal laughed at first.

"You belong to the Philistine band of Shasta. You all look alike—dark, giant-like, and merciless."

"A pretty good picture!" exclaimed the Shasta sport. "If you resemble your race, madam, I wouldn't want to take a wife from among you. Your eyes are devilishly dark, and there's beauty enough left to work a world of mischief in the right place. Who am I, eh? They call me Jubal."

"Jubal?" repeated the woman. "Not the man I sent down to his master on the mountain trail."

"Not that gentleman," bowed the Sunset tough.

"Are you queen here?" continued Jubal. "I did not know that the Monk's Mystery had a princess of your sort."

"I'm a queen of vengeance!" was the response.

"Oh!"

Jubal leaned against the stone wall and looked at the face before him.

"Then you will let me help you to that revenge, won't you?" queried he.

"Do you know this mine?"

"Not as well as you do."

"I?"

"Yes. You have been followed from corridor to corridor."

"By you?" asked the woman, with flashing eyes.

"Why not?"

"Then you are a spy."

"Don't I look like one?" grinned Jubal.

She looked him over from head to foot, a swift look, but a searching one.

"You must show me," Jubal went on.

"Show you what?"

"The prison of the nabob—the trap that has closed upon the Croesus of 'Frisco."

A sudden spark of joy illuminated the woman's eyes.

"Then, he is here?" she exclaimed.

"You know it! You can lead me to the death-trap set long ago by the mad doctor of Shasta."

"I know nothing about the trap."

Jubal met this declaration with a look full of doubt.

"Woman," he said, sternly, "I am here for the truth! I am more than a mere trailer. I am oath-bound. You have not traversed this mine for nothing. You know where the rat gnaws the side of his trap. You must show me, or, by the living God! this place becomes your tomb!"

The woman met the Philistine's look with an ashen stare of mingled defiance and horror, and she would have answered if at that moment a stone had not dropped from above and knocked the light from her hand.

CHAPTER XXIX.

JUBAL'S FATE.

LADY LEONE—the woman encountered by Jubal in the mine was the nabob's enemy—fell from him with a shriek, and the following instant the Shasta hunter found no arm in his grip.

"Have I lost the witch?" he thought. "If so, I must pursue my search without her assistance, and Monte Cristo Teton may elude me."

But Leone had not left the spot, for when Jubal started forward with his hands thrust out he found her rigid and listening in the dark.

"It came from above," she whispered. "Some one is up there, for a human foot loosened the stone."

"Is there a path overhead?" asked Jubal.

"The mine is full of strange trails."

For a moment longer the two stood silent, when the man from Sunset asked:

"Who can be overhead? Not the lost nabob?"

A laugh was the answer he received.

"The trap that caught him has no open door," the woman said. "If he were at large, I would have found him. I am the tigress that has never left his trail. The claws kept so long beneath the velvet have come forth for vengeance. No, spy of Shasta, the foot of Colonel Teton did not loosen the stone that put out the light."

"Whose then?"

"The foot of another trailer," and Jubal knew that the lips over which the answer came almost touched his face.

"Another hunter?"

"Yes; Shasta Land is full of trail-dogs; but the one above us has a double mission. He can follow two trails at once."

"I know him. It is Shasta Sid."

"The nabob's ferret, but now trailing on his own hook."

Jubal understood.

The millionaire's ferret was in the mine.

He, too, was looking for the lost nabob—the man who had been taken to doom by Doctor Doc, the avenging Esculapius of the hills.

"Let us hunt together," resumed Lady Leone after a brief pause. "Should we find him we can fight for possession, or agree peaceably?"

If Jubal could have seen the look that came to the woman's face while she spoke, he might have cautioned himself to be on his guard; but he saw nothing in the dark, and told Leone to lead on.

Guided by the beautiful huntress, he was taken deeper into the mine as it were.

"There is one part of this place as yet unexplored by me," she explained.

"That is the part we want to seek," was the response.

"Here," whispered Leone after a long journey in the darkness. "If Shasta Sid sees us, well and good. I will have a light, for without one I cannot show you the tracks in the fine dust here."

Jubal took the taper from Leone's hand and held it close to the ground.

"They have been here. One of these tracks is the nabob's."

"I thought so," answered the woman, showing him a face aglow with triumph. "Nothing ever escapes me, though I let many years pass away."

A few rods further on the woman halted suddenly and looked at Jubal.

"Did you hear that?" she queried.

"I heard nothing."

"Put your ear to the wall."

Jubal did so, holding his breath and listening with all his might.

"I hear a noise like a far-away voice," he said, looking at her.

"That is it."

"It is still now."

"As if death had come, Captain Jubal!"

"Not that, I hope, if we have heard him."

"Good! Death must not come to Doctor Doc's prisoner—not until I have summoned him!"

Lady Leone and Jubal listened a while longer, but the sound seemed to have ceased forever.

"Come!" cried the huntress, seizing his wrist. "If we had the old monk here, we'd make him lay bare the whole interior of his mine. Hark!"

Again she stood like a statue with her finger at her lips and a look of caution in her eye.

"Followed! trailed by the spy overhead!" she whispered.

"You did not hear it? No? A little pebble struck me on the hand. I barely felt it, but it told enough."

Jubal involuntarily looked up, but far overhead all was as dark as Egypt, and with the darkness was mingled a silence truly ominous.

Was Shasta Sid up there?

"This is getting interesting," said Jubal, taking his knife in his left hand, and feeling the wall with the other as if searching for steps in the stone.

"If there were a way up to him!" he found himself saying madly.

"There is a way up."

Jubal started.

"I will show you a path to the trails above us," continued Lady Leone. "We are in the basement of the Monk's Mystery. Do you want to find the whereabouts of the spy?"

"Yes!"

Jubal had thought rapidly before replying.

Until this man, Shasta Sid, is out of the way I cannot hope to succeed. True, he is the nabob's spy and seeks his rescue, but he will not let Captain Buck have the credit, and that is what we want."

Lady Leone had his hand again, and leading him on without a word, brought him to a series of deep niches cut into the wall which lost itself in gloom overhead.

"This is the way up to him," said she holding her candle so that the light fell upon the niche. "We can't expect to triumph with the shadow of Shasta hovering, vulture-like, over the trail. The yellow ferret must perish first."

Jubal transferred his knife to his teeth.

"Where will you be when I come back?" he asked.

"Here, if you don't stay away till the Resurrection," was the reply, accompanied by a faint laugh.

Jubal grinned and put his hands in the niche above his head.

The next moment he was climbing up the wall, hand-over-hand, and with the resolution of a thorough-paced desperado.

Lady Leone watched him until the candle no longer revealed his figure, then, with a laugh, saying, "The fool has a hot head on his shoulders!" she walked away, leaving Jubal midway between the stone floor and the unknown trail.

Let us follow the Shasta hunter.

He went up the wall with the knife between his teeth.

Fifty feet above the spot where he had left Leone his hand found a ledge of rock, and in a short time he had drawn himself up on it, and was resting.

Around him all was gloom and silence.

Shasta Sid, tiger-like, might be within reach, for he had not the eyes of the owl, and could not pierce the dark.

After a while Jubal explored the ledge, and found that it extended many feet from the brink like a floor.

He advanced cautiously in his explorations; he took one step after another only after a careful investigation with his hands; but all the time he kept the knife between his teeth.

"It may be a hunt for hearts before I go back," said Jubal to himself, "and I want to be the lucky hunter."

For an hour, as he reckoned time, the man in the dark crept on all-fours, or advanced erect, as his surroundings permitted.

All at once he saw ahead the faint glow of a light.

Jubal halted.

"That light is below me," thought he. "It is the reflection on the ceiling that I see. Have I found Shasta Sid? Or, better still, has fate guided me to the nabob's dungeon?"

He approached the light, and saw it waver on the dull gray stone which formed the ceiling over him.

Jubal halted at last—halted with his heart in his throat, if ever a human heart was there.

He found himself at the edge of the floor over which he had crawled for more than an hour on his dark and dangerous man-hunt.

The light which he saw was strong beneath him.

He knew that by craning forward he could look down into a pit of some nature, yet he shrank from the ordeal.

That he had found the avenging doctor's victim there was no longer any doubt in his mind, but in what sort of a trap was he?

The Philistine spy held back several minutes before he advanced again.

"Pshaw! be a man, Jubal!" he said to himself, and, setting his teeth hard, he bent forward and looked.

At first Jubal saw nothing but a natural chamber whose walls seemed as smooth as walls of lava.

Far beneath him burned a candle that pro-

truded from the rock, and threw its light upward, showing his pale face and searching eyes.

"Empty!" cried Jubal. "This place has had a tenant, but now—"

He was stopped by a figure that came into view from the darkest corner of the cavern.

"My God! Colonel Teton!"

The person below stopped and looked up.

Jubal, instead of speaking again, held his breath.

He saw beneath him the well-known figure of the 'Frisco nabob; but it seemed to Jubal that twenty years had been added to Monte Cristo Teton's life.

"I thought I heard a voice," came up to the Shasta spy, in tones of despair. "My God! one can hear a thousand deceiving sounds in this stone hell. I heard nothing. It is the beginning of the end. I can go back to the fiends in the gloom. I can invite them to attack and finish the game which started off so propitiously! My ferret will never find me here!"

Jubal did not hear all these words.

The Philistine had taken from his bosom a coil of rope which he was undoing a few feet from the top of the mine-trap.

Already he had found a ragged corner of stone which seemed to invite the loop in the rope.

He slipped it over the point and made it fast.

Having done this Jubal ventured to look into the chamber again.

This time he saw no one.

Colonel Teton had disappeared, but the candle still burned from the wall, giving him (Jubal) all the light he wanted.

He lowered the rope over the top of the wall and saw it uncoil until it nearly touched the floor below.

Then he caught the cord firmly and let his body over the ledge.

Jubal was going down into the trap.

"If Captain Buck could see me, he would not think me faithless," he muttered. "And if Leone were on the watch—what?"

The man from Sunset had fairly launched himself on the perilous descent when he heard a cry that caused him to stop for a second.

Looking down over his shoulder, he beheld the lost nabob in the middle of the dungeon.

Surprise was depicted on every feature exposed to Jubal's gaze.

"Go back, unless you want to tempt the most terrible of deaths!" cried the nabob, wildly throwing up his hands.

Jubal's teeth met, and he answered:

"Never!"

"Fool!" replied a voice, which was not the gold king's. "Then perish where you are, and go down to him dead!"

At the same time the place rung with a loud report; the head of the man in mid-air fell back with a jerk, his grip suddenly relaxed, and, descending like a bomb, he fell a mass of quivering flesh at the feet of Monte Cristo Teton!

Then all was still again.

CHAPTER XXX.

FROM PIT TO PREY.

"A PHILISTINE!" exclaimed Monte Cristo Teton, bending horrified over the body on the stones, and, while he gazed, he saw the final death-quiver and the last stretching of Jubal's limbs.

The death-shot had not ceased to echo when the 'Frisco Croesus caught sight of the dangling rope.

With a wild cry of joy he sprung toward the wall and eagerly caught the cord.

He did not ask who had fired the shot, nor did he seem to care.

It meant deliverance, and that was enough.

"Look in the Philistine's bosom!" cried a voice from above.

Colonel Teton looked up, but saw no one.

Obeying the command, he went back to the body and searched as directed.

A folded paper was his reward.

"Keep that," said the same voice, and Teton did so.

Jubal gave up nothing more beyond the knife which remained between his teeth until the flight of his soul.

This Teton took and again advanced to the rope.

"Do you want help?"

"Help to quit this devil's trap?" cried the nabob.

"Then come on."

Aided by the wall, which braced his feet, the Californian came up the rope hand-over-hand.

"Ah! here you are!" exclaimed some one at the top of the wall, and, as a hand was thrust toward him, he saw the face of Shasta Sid.

An exclamation of joy parted the nabob's lips.

By the help of that hand he was drawn up on the ledge, where he began to shower the mountain ferret with the most profuse thanks.

"The ingenuity of man never invented a more infamous trap than the one down there," he said, with a shudder, as he looked into the pit from which he had escaped.

"Think of being cooped up with twenty half-starved rattlesnakes; think of opening a box and releasing the whole lot! Isn't my hair grayer than it was, Shasta Sid?"

The Californian detective looked at Colonel Teton and answered with a cry.

"I thought so," grimly smiled the nabob, and then he added through his teeth:

"Won't some one pay for this?"

The candle in the wall below had burned nearly to its socket and the light which it had cast upon the ceiling of the pit was rapidly dying out.

"Let us go," said Shasta Sid.

A minute later the two men were crawling away amid darkness and the nabob's trail-hound conducted him to a certain place from which they could descend to the main entrance to the mine.

"We will avoid the tigress for the present," remarked Shasta Sid.

"The tigress?" echoed the nabob. "Where is she?"

"Nearer than you think."

"Not in the mine?"

"In the mine."

Colonel Teton seized his ferret's arm.

"Why not find her?" he exclaimed. "I may never get another chance like this one. You have sent my blood boiling through my veins, Lady Leone, my old enemy, in this accursed cavern! We must find her."

"Your word is law for me. I am in your hands," answered Shasta Sid.

"Then, let our tigress-hunt begin."

They went down to the main floor of the mine, and halted in the gloom that reigned everywhere.

During the descent Colonel Teton was told of certain events of which he knew nothing.

"That Blonde Buck, the captain of the rebels, should want to rescue me is strange," he said.

"Not so very strange," answered Shasta Sid.

"Explain it."

"In the first place, there's a pair of black eyes in the game."

"Stella's?"

"Do you think so, colonel?"

"No, not Stella's," cried the nabob. "But Manon's!"

There was no response.

"So Blonde Buck wanted to rescue me that he might have a claim on Manon, did he?"

"What else would be his object?"

"I see!" exclaimed the 'Frisco Croesus. "Let him take the tiger's image!"

Monte Christo Teton had recalled the startling revelation which had fallen from Doctor Doc's lips during the ride to the mine.

"I say let him have Manon!" he went on.

"There was a time when I would have resented such a thought; but now I cast the girl from me."

"Manon, colonel?"

"The beautiful fraud!" almost hissed the nabob, and then Shasta Sid heard his voice drop to a whisper:

"She isn't mine, they say," said he.

"Who says so?"

Colonel Teton hesitated.

"He told me. Doctor Doc said that no blood of mine flows through the girl's veins."

"Do you believe it?"

"Look at her face."

"Well?"

"And her disposition. She has the heart of the woman now lurking somewhere amid the darkness of this old death-trap."

"Then whose offspring is she?"

There was no reply, as if Shasta Sid's query had rendered its listener dumb.

"Whose child? I dare not think," said Teton, at last. "I have held her to my heart; but not often since I discovered the infernal resemblance. From that moment, with all my heart, I hated her. I could have strangled her a thousand times, but some unseen power held me back. If I had done it, Blonde Buck would not be playing for her now, and the corpse in the den of robbers would possess the breath of life."

The nabob's detective heard him through.

"There is a mystery here," said he.

"A deep one," was the reply.

"Your wife gave you a child?"

"Yes. It was Nita's counterpart when it came into the world; had her soft eyes, and her matchless mouth; but all at once everything changed."

"The eyes, too, colonel?"

"The eyes themselves. One night wrought the change. It was like a rose turning into a thistle."

"How did you ever account for the transformation?"

"I never

Several minutes passed, and then he felt the lips of his faithful ferret brush his ear.

"There is some one straight ahead," whispered Shasta Sid. "I don't think thirty feet separate us."

"Thank Heaven!" responded the 'Frisco nabob.

He freed his arm from Shasta's touch and would have moved forward if the hand had not restrained him.

"We don't know who is there?" again said the mustache, as it were.

"It can be but the tigress."

"Wait, colonel."

The blood of the nabob seemed on fire in his veins.

His impulse was to dash forward and seize whatever stood in the corridor.

If Lady Leone were there so much the better.

He could settle forever the old feud; he could force her against the wall, and draw from her lips, perhaps, the solution of the mystery concerning Manon's fatal beauty.

After this, Doctor Doc.

He could go back to Sunset with Shasta Sid to back him, and play a new hand against his enemy, and for the girl Croesus's bonanza.

Yes, the Rattlesnake Mine might yet be his, and he could go back to the 'Frisco palace richer and freer than when he left it.

He thought thus while he stood in the dark, keeping down with difficulty the impulse which all the time urged him forward.

Monte Cristo Teton bit his lips to the blood while he waited in the dark.

Lady Leone within thirty feet?

The opportunity might never come again.

"Let me find her," he whispered, his hand finding the wrist of his spy. "The secret—the truth about Manon—is within my grasp. Besides the path can be cleared of one foe. She is a woman, but her sex counts nothing here."

The hand fell off from the wrist it had seized. Shasta Sid felt Colonel Teton glide from the spot he occupied.

He put out his hand but the California nabob was gone.

He could not see the human figure slipping forward, but he could imagine it.

Monte Cristo Teton kept close to the wall of the corridor which was a narrow one.

"I must be near her," he thought, halting. "I have advanced, as near as I can tell, twenty-five feet. But I hear nothing."

The silence of the grave surrounded him.

"Why not push forward suddenly, with my hand thrown out, and ready to close the instant it touches anything?" he asked himself.

The suggestion thrilled him.

He drew back the hand that held the dead Philistine's bowie and threw forward the other one.

The following moment he threw himself forward, sweeping along the wall, and halting fully ten feet away.

He had touched nothing!

"She is gone!" he exclaimed, madly. "The woman of vengeance and mystery has slipped through my fingers."

And he called to Shasta Sid who came up more than half pleased, as his voice showed, that there had been no encounter in the dark.

"The tiger witch did not wait for me!" the nabob exclaimed. "Therefore, she has an unsoiled throat and a heart unbled."

"Would you have killed her?"

"Why not?"

"But the secret!"

"Oh, I should have had that first."

The next instant a laugh rung through the passage and seemed to still the hearts of the nabob and his ferret.

"The gold-bug suspects, does he?" said the voice that followed the derisive cachinnation. "The time is not far distant when the soaring vulture shall swoop upon the carcass of its mate. The game begun in the South, shall, after having prospered among the palaces of 'Frisco, end beyond the death and vengeance in the gold-ribbed heart of Shasta Land. There is no escape!"

Colonel Teton started forward as the voice ended.

"I accept the challenge!" cried he. "Monte Cristo Teton is no coward, even though the tigress hunts him in the dark!"

"Monte Cristo Teton is not the man I hunt," came the swift response. "I trail Gulch Gideon. I know no Nabob of 'Frisco. I am the enemy of the man who, years ago, as the magnate of the desert's capital, committed a crime as cruel as the grave!"

The voice ceased with Colonel Teton breathless and quivering in the darkness.

"Stand by me, Shasta," he whispered. "But two throats appear between us and success—the woman's and Doctor Doc's."

And the hand that touched the nabob's told him that the ferret of California was still faithful.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SOME HOT BLOOD.

THERE waited in Sunset City for his right bower, for the man whom he had sent out to save Colonel Teton from the avenging wiles of

Doctor Doc, Blonde Buck, the captain of the rebellious Philistines.

Hour followed hour; a day ran its course and passed, and another night deepened over the rough landscape.

Jubal did not come.

If Blonde Buck could have pierced the shadows that lay between the old mine and Sunset—if he could have looked through the wall of the pit of serpents—he would have known why his hunter spy remained away.

After his interview with Doctor Doc, Blonde Buck counted the hours with a good deal of anxiety.

Jubal had taken the map of the wild region with him, and the leader of the mutineers cursed himself for intrusting the precious document to him.

But Jubal would not—could not—fail, and he (Blonde Buck) would soon reap the reward, of his happy thought.

As the rescuer of the 'Frisco nabob he could demand his own reward, and he had already made up his mind what that demand would be.

While Blonde Buck waited impatiently in his shanty, going to the door every now and then in hopes of greeting his spy, Manon, the fair counterpart of the human tigress from the South, was riding fast down the trail which soon lost itself among the rough hills.

The girl had bade adieu to Sunset City and, seated firmly on the horse that bore her along, was letting the night wind touch her cheeks and play through her soft tresses.

She kept up the rapid gait until she had put some miles between her and the camp behind.

"I am going to know!" said she, breathing her thoughts aloud. "There is one who holds the secret and I must find her. She is in the game. I know that her hand came between Monte Cristo Teton and the Rattlesnake Bonanza. Where is she? Captain Buck says that the message which killed the bargain came from the South. I am now riding toward the southern star. The woman called Lady Leone is somewhere ahead. She must be known by many. A woman of her stamp cannot hide. I look like her. They say I have her blood; that I am her counterpart in everything; yet, Colonel Teton calls me his daughter—the child of Nita!"

Day found Manon far from the camp in the heart of the Shastan hills.

She had not ridden hard all the time.

Suddenly there appeared far beneath the trail, along which her steed moved slowly, a collection of low-roofed cabins which filled her eyes with joy.

She rode slowly down the steep pathway, and then straight toward the camp.

A dozen rough men stared at her from the moment of her entrance, and selecting one who stood with folded arms in his door, Manon drew rein before him.

"Where am I?" she queried.

"In Harmony Hollow, miss," was the response.

Manon smiled.

Harmony Hollow was a queer name for a town whose inhabitants looked like they stood ready on the slightest provocation to fly at each other's throats.

"Do you know of a woman called Leone?"

The big tough's eyes seemed to twinkle.

"By Jove! you look like her!" he exclaimed.

"Then you know her?"

"She lives here."

Manon could hardly hold back a cry of exultation.

"Show me her house."

The man's finger pointed down the straggling street.

Manon fixed her eyes on the house to which her attention was called.

"But she isn't here now," continued the citizen. "Went away night before last."

"For good?"

"I guess not."

Manon rode toward the designated house, and lifting the latch, went inside.

The sun was shining in through the little window beside the door, and revealed the whole interior of the room.

"So this is Leone's place?" murmured Manon. "She doesn't play queen here," and a few moments later, glad to rest after her ride from Sunset, she threw herself upon the simple cot in one corner and watched the sunbeams on the glass.

By and by she fell asleep; she could not resist the powers of the drowsy god, and the curious eyes that came to the window after awhile saw her motionless on the couch, whereat these same eyes shone mischievously.

When the man went away he took Manon's horse along, and the animal soon fed sumptuously on the rich grass at the edge of the camp. Manon's slumber was long and deep.

She did not hear the click of the latch, nor see the figure which crossed the threshold.

"Merciful God!" exclaimed a shrill voice, and in a second the eyes of Manon, the nabob's child, were wide open.

She saw standing over her a tall woman whose face was flushed from surprise, and on whose lips still quivered the words by which she had been awakened.

Intuition told her that she had found Lady Leone.

"Get up!" commanded the girl's visitor, and Manon was on her feet almost before the last word had been spoken.

"Stand over there!" continued the stranger, pointing to a spot where, when she had taken it, the sunlight bathed her face and figure.

Manon then found herself scrutinized as she had never been scrutinized before.

"When did you come?" queried Lady Leone.

"Early this morning."

"From where?"

"From Sunset."

"Ah! from the home of the Philistines!"

Manon nodded.

"Then he had not come back when you left?"

"He?" echoed the girl inquiringly.

"Monte Cristo Teton."

"What! is he out of the trap?"

Lady Leone's eyes appeared to flash.

"They rescued him," said she, leaning forward; "but it cost a life. The spy—his hired ferret—found him."

"Shasta Sid?"

"Yes."

"I never liked that man!" exclaimed Manon.

"He is better than his master, though," cried Lady Leone, bitterly.

"Then he does not have to be very good."

A smile passed over Leone's face.

"What! don't you like your father?" she asked.

Manon started.

"Do you call him that?" she answered, going forward until the uplifted hand of Leone checked her impulsiveness. "I have longed to ask you this, and now that I have found you, I won't let the opportunity pass. Look me in the eye. You are Lady Leone, sometimes called the Tigress of the South."

"Who calls me that?"

"Those who profess to know you best."

"Colonel Teton for one?"

"Yes."

"He ought to know!" and the lips of the speaker got a smile again.

"Tell me—let us go back to the subject—tell me whether the Nabob of 'Frisco is my father."

The eyes that regarded Manon got a light she could not interpret; they seemed a greater mystery than the woman herself.

"You don't want to know some things now," evasively answered Leone.

"I want to know that!" cried Manon.

There was no answer, the eyes watching her as before.

"You know, yet you will not speak," she went on. "The time has come for the unriddling of the mystery. I have grown up under his roof; he has acknowledged me as his daughter though he wanted to throttle me half the time."

"Why, girl?"

"You ought to know. He says that my face bears an accursed stamp; that I look like you!"

If Lady Leone expected this revelation, she did not show it.

She fell back from before Manon, her lips at the same time parting in a strange cry.

"Can I be his child and look like you?" the girl continued. "Why, some devilish sorcery had charge of my birth if this be true! Nita, blonde and gentle, with a seraph's face and a fragile figure. Look at me! Do I make a picture of this sort? Am I the child of Nita? Can I be and have your face; ay, your very blood, they say? By the God above us, Lady Leone, the secret which is locked in your bosom must be opened to me!"

"You should have patience, child!"

"And be consumed by my own thoughts? No! It was to find you that I left Sunset. I would have trailed you to the uttermost ends of the earth but what I would have run you down. Tell me! Say that I am the nabob's child, despite my face, and I will seek no further. Tell me that Nita was my mother and I will even go back to the man who has hated me from the cradle."

Lady Leone looked away.

Manon, who was watching her like a hawk, saw the blood mantle her temples, and suddenly departing, leaving them as white as marble.

"You must speak!" she said, seizing the woman's arm.

"I am Manon Teton or I am nothing! Now or never!"

Leone broke from Manon's grasp and almost staggered toward the door.

"Will you keep the secret?" cried the nabob's heir. "I will not quit this den of terrors without it."

The hand that came up from Manon's side clutched something that glittered, and the quick eye of Leone saw the polished blade of a dagger.

"It shall be now or never!" exclaimed Manon.

"Here, in your own house, I will cut one of two things—the cords that bind the secret or the thread of your life!"

In instant the tigress nature of the nabob's enemy seemed to spring into full being.

"You will cut neither, my life's curse!" she seemed to hiss, at the same time throwing out a

hand and catching Manon's wrist beneath the knife.

"The time will come, but it can't be hastened!" And the dagger was shaken from the girl's grip by a dexterous twist, and, falling, buried its point in the floor at Leone's feet.

"That's better than a heart," smiled the woman, eying for a moment the quivering blade, and then suddenly releasing Manon she fell back and touched the latch.

"You may cool off alone," she added, opening the door, and the following moment Manon was the sole tenant of the place.

Lady Leone had coolly walked away.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SWIFT MESSENGER.

"I WILL not be baffled in this manner!" exclaimed the nabob's heir, her passion by no means abated by Lady Leone's parting sentence. "She keeps from me that which I have a right to know, and I will make her surrender the secret!"

She went to the door, but the figure of the millionaire's foe had already disappeared, and Manon was compelled to swallow her chagrin.

She waited awhile, but Leone did not return, and when she sought her in the camp she learned that she had quietly departed.

"My horse!" cried the girl. "I can follow. Once on the trail of the secret connected with my life, I shall not give up until I have obtained it. The Tigress of the South shall not baffle me long."

Meantime Leone had reached the trails among the mountains and above the camp.

Seated on her horse, her eye discerned the solitary figure that left Harmony Hollow, far beneath her position, and she watched it with almost breathless curiosity.

"She has the hot blood of her race!" exclaimed Leone. "If the time had come for her to know what she sought, I should have told her; but she cannot wrench from me the secret I hold."

Lady Leone continued to watch the moving figure, which she knew belonged to Manon. Now the girl would be lost to view, and now again she would reappear, with her face turned toward the mountains.

A few yards from the spot from which Leone watched the nabob's heir, crouched a man with black eyes and a dark face.

We have seen him but once in the course of our romance, and then when he stopped Shasta Sid after the ferret's miraculous escape from death by stepping from the mountain trail under menace of Lady Leone's revolver.

This person watched the statuesque figure of the tigress with eyes that fairly glittered with savage delight.

"Ha! my desert bird; found at last!" chuckled he. "Did you think death had snapped the bonds which once united us?—that Teton Sam, the third member of the old trio, was dust on some border trail? I've felt your hand, Leone. I know what you are. You still hate the Nabob of 'Frisco, and I don't blame you; but why don't you seek him, and beat him at the game he plays?"

Teton Sam looked down into the valley but failed to see the object that held the woman's attention.

"I guess I'll surprise you," he resumed, looking again at Leone. "The last time I saw you was under different circumstances. I saw the flash of a revolver, and then came the darkness of death. Since that moment of hot blood, Lady Leone, I have been dead to you. But Teton Sam is 'dead' no longer!"

He crept toward the woman on horseback, keeping in the shadows of the rocks that lined one side of the trail, and making no more noise than a crawling panther.

Not for an instant did he take his eyes from the person he had marked.

Within twenty feet of Leone he rose slowly and eyed her a moment longer in silence.

"Paquina!" said he.

If an arrow had hurtled through her hair the nabob's enemy would not have turned with more suddenness.

She lost color the moment she saw the man who had spoken the strange name.

"Oh, I'm back from the dead!" laughed Teton Sam. "I thought your old name, one which you've probably forgotten, would startle you most, hence the utterance. "You know me," the man moved forward while he spoke. "The last time I saw you you said: 'Die like a man, Captain Sam!' And then came the shot."

Leone smiled as if in confirmation of the desperado's words.

"You have new quarters," continued the man, looking down into the valley. "You still hate the gilded Nabob of 'Frisco—the old Gulch Gideon of other days."

"Did you think I would forget?"

"No. Women of your blood never forget," answered Teton Sam. "Where is Delle Paso?"

"Dead."

"In his boots?"

"Yes."

"Who did it?"

"The Shadows of Shasta."

Teton Sam leaned toward Leone with new interest depicted on his countenance.

"Who are the Shadows of Shasta?" he inquired.

"A lot of independent marauders; to be specific, six masked men who ride the trails at odd intervals."

"Mountain freebooters, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why did they finish your—Delle Paso?"

"I don't know."

"Have they ever molested you?"

"Never."

"Lady Leone, have I changed much?"

"Not a great deal."

"You hold your tigress beauty to a remarkable degree," and Teton Sam grinned. "Let us go into the mountains."

The woman gave a slight start.

"I mean it," continued the man. "I want to say something where the shadows are deep."

She looked at him as if she would pierce him through.

He took hold of her bridle rein and looked up with his lips welded into one as it were.

"A man who comes back from the dead is always dangerous!" said he. "I am one of that kind."

Whether Lady Leone saw the revolver in Teton Sam's hand or overlooked it, she did not answer.

The following minute he was leading her from the spot and in a little time they were some rods from the trail in a place so secluded that the sunlight did not penetrate it.

Teton Sam had tipped back his hat, displaying a deep scar that extended half way across his forehead. It seemed to mark the passing of a bullet, and Leone who had noticed it had given it more than a casual glance.

"Your autograph, madam," suddenly said Sam, touching the scar. "It was a close shave, and caused me many a mad hour and a hundred oaths of vengeance."

Leone seemed to regret that her aim had not been truer, for she looked at the scar and then bit her lips.

"Get down!" commanded Teton Sam.

The occupant of the saddle hesitated.

He put up his hand and closed on her wrist.

"This is no child's game," he went on. "Madam, by the gods of justice! I will take you down if you prove stubborn."

Never before, as her look showed, had Leone been addressed thus.

She dismounted and stood before Teton Sam, one hand resting on the rein.

"It was a pretty play wasn't it?" smiled he.

"What was?"

"The 'Frisco card."

Leone looked bewildered.

"What! must I freshen a memory like yours?" he laughed. "It was a wild night and the storm bent the trees about the palace which Gulch Gideon had built in the city of the nabobs. He was Colonel Teton then, so well had he prospered, and so fast had his coffers filled. It was a wild night, eh, Paquina?"

Lady Leone made no reply.

"It was twelve o'clock. A young child lay asleep in its cradle, and the nurse was in a stupor. All at once through the yard below glided a figure—"

"Why all this?" broke in the listener. "I don't see the use of an old story of this kind."

"You don't, eh? I was just freshening your memory. Don't want to hear it? Well, I won't go on. But the figure crossed the yard all the same; it disappeared toward the nabob's house, and by and by it came back— What makes you look at me so?—it came back, I say."

The woman seemed to have grown into a statue in front of Teton Sam, and looking steadily at her he laughed outright.

"That was long ago. The nabob's child has grown to womanhood. Pretty? She ought to be. Her mother was beautiful."

"Nita was pretty enough to win the gold vulture of the South!" almost grated Leone with a flash of mad jealousy in her eyes.

"No; he won her at the expense of a trip across the Devil's Desert. Do you know what became of the Mazeppa?"

"I know."

"He, too, has a memory, eh, Paquina?"

"He has!"

"And he is playing for vengeance now?"

"Yes."

"Just as many of us are," answered Teton Sam. "But let us put an end to this."

He walked away and halted a few feet from Leone.

"I treat you as a tigress, not as a woman!" said he, throwing up his hand and showing the nabob's enemy the cocked revolver she had seen before.

"There, come back to me now, heating the blood in every part of my body, the most terrible memories of my life after your deliberate shot. Because we quarreled—because you wanted to dispose of the man who had served you well. Teton Sam—you sent me headlong from you with, as you thought, a bullet in the brain. Do you expect mercy now?"

"Not from you," answered the woman.

"Then you shall not be disappointed!"

Leone stood in the middle of the little trail that ran through the hidden spot, her figure drawn to its true height, and no sign of fear on her face.

Teton Sam, with the look of a cool, calculating demon, raised the six-shooter until it rested on a level with Lady Leone's heart.

He saw the eyes that were fixed upon him, saw, too, the closed lips and clinched hands.

"You gave me no time!" came over the revolver. "You took snap judgment on the man for whom you had no further use, and I dropped. Now I return the dreadful compliment. Here, madam, ends the flight of the desert vulture, or, as some would saw, the hunt of the Sonoma tigress."

The next instant the place rung with a shot that sent Leone's horse from his halting spot, and with a quick recoil and a sudden cry, Teton Sam pitched from his tracks and dropped sidelong on the scant grass.

"A turn of the tide!" was Leone's exclamation, as she looked at the death-struck face of the desert tough, then turning toward the place whence the deadly missile had come, she grew a trifle pale as she saw the resolute figure planted there.

"It was Manon's."

"You will tell me now, won't you?" said the girl.

"No!" And Lady Leone was in the saddle again, and the excited rescuer saw her ride over the dead man in the trail and vanish once more.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FERRET'S GRIP.

"Not after that?" Manon asked herself, gazing at the form in the trail, and then looking again down the gulch she saw that Lady Leone had entirely disappeared.

After a few moments the girl went forward and gazed down at the dark face of the man she had sent to his account at the threshold of a savage triumph.

"He did not belong to Sunset City," she murmured. "No, he was not a Philistine. This man had some sort of vengeance to satisfy; but"—she turned away as she finished—"he did not get to play his wild game out."

Manon remounted and rode away, and Teton Sam was left where he had fallen.

"The next play of Lady Leone may be at Sunset," thought Manon. "The birds of prey will come together again, and why not there? I will go back," and, turning her horse toward the mountain camp, she rode into it as the shadows of its cabins, lengthening toward the east, foretold the approach of another night.

The girl went straight to her abode, but ere she reached it she had seen the inquisitive eyes of Doctor Doc fixed upon her.

"Does the doctor suspect?" mentally asked Manon. "He can know nothing; he has been here all the time. I met Lady Leone and killed the man called Teton Sam, and the doctor of Shasta is none the wiser."

Manon found the camp quiet.

There was nothing in the air to tell that the man who had been left to perish in the mine-trap had been rescued, and that he and his ferret, Shasta Sid, were planning to get even, and to win at last the bonanza prize which had lured him from the 'Frisco palace.

Manon stood at the one window of the little house with her gaze riveted upon a certain doorway which she could see despite the gathering shadows.

It was where Stella nursed Theo the young Philistine and the victim of Crimson Clint's hot head.

"I'd like to know who you are," murmured Manon. "They say you are a mystery—that no one knows anything about your parentage. I don't believe that! You have a name besides Stella. I have seen one who can lift the veil of mystery if she would. She knows you, Stella of Sunset; to Lady Leone you are no puzzle."

Thus talked Manon to herself while she eyed the portal of Stella's cabin.

"You know nothing about yourself; I'm convinced of that," she went on. "To yourself you are nameless beyond the single name you bear and that is not your right one. It would do me no good to ask you for the secret. I tried that once in your bonanza, and got nothing for my pains. I won't ask you for what you do not know, but I hate you all the same. I look like Lady Leone, they say; I am like her, and my blood gets hot just like hers."

As Manon finished, the door she had been watching opened slowly and she saw, not Stella, but the form of a young man who held to the sides of the portal for support.

"Tis Theo!" exclaimed the 'Frisco beauty.

"She is bringing him back to health, everybody knows for what," and she gazed at the young Philistine with a strange curiosity and in silence.

Theo stood in the doorway a few moments, enjoying the twilight and drinking in the air which seemed to carry healing on its wings.

Evidently he was alone, for she saw nothing of Stella, and she watched the Philistine until he retired.

A few minutes later the long shadows be-

came one, and the short twilight gave way again to real night.

Manon did not see the figure which approached Theo's shanty from the spot where Doctor Doc's cabin stood.

It was the doctor himself.

Walking lightly over the ground as if on a secret mission the once Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert approached the wounded man's abode.

He did not think of his old enemy now. He had left him with the rattlesnakes in the mine and by that time the Croesus of California had died the most terrible of deaths, cursing his triumphant enemy to the end.

The surgeon of Shasta came alongside Theo's cabin with the steps of a prowling leopard.

He saw the dim light in the window, and sidling up to the rude sill, pushed his head beyond the frame and looked inside.

"I thought so!" he growled over the sight he saw. "There's healing in that woman's touch!"

He saw Theo seated on the edge of his cot, one knee in his hands and a smile on the face which was still marked by the sufferings he had endured.

"It won't take him long at this rate to get out," Doctor Doc went on, not for a second taking his eye from the man who was entirely oblivious of his dangerous presence. "She isn't here now—gone back across the line to her own, probably—and one might have it all his own way."

There was a terrible suggestiveness in these words as they dropped from the doctor's tongue. Nothing but a pane of glass stood between him and the man he hated.

He continued to watch Theo with the malignant countenance of a new Satan. He did not seem to breathe.

This was better than going into the house and being surprised with the wounded Philistine.

Suddenly Doctor Doc's hand moved up toward the window.

He looked up and down the street but could see no one. The only sounds that came to his ears were those that came from the men playing under the candles at the "hotel" on the square.

Theo in a brown study saw nothing of the shadow at the window.

The hand reached the sill, and the figure of Doctor Doc went back until the arm was almost straight.

At the same moment the man in the shanty moved.

Theo stood erect, revealing his whole figure to the gleaming eyes on the outside.

"What startled him?" asked the Philistine doctor.

The young man stood for a second in the middle of the room, then going to the cot ran his hand beneath the pillow and drew forth a little book, the leaves of which were roughly stitched together.

At sight of this object, Doctor Doc with difficulty kept back a cry.

"Did he find my diary?" he thought. "Does he know that it is mine? My life is written there, though no names are mentioned; but if he puts this and that together as he reads, he will know."

Theo went to the table, over which he bent with the book in his hands.

"I want that book!" cried the doctor of Sunset. "What if Stella should see it?"

He did not know that the girl Croesus had seen it, that she had studied every line, and gathered from the yellow pages the story of his past and his thirst for revenge.

He raised the revolver once more; the muzzle of the deadly barrel was lifted above the sill until it covered the head bent over the history of a life.

At that moment the silence about him was broken.

There fell upon his ear the sound of a footstep, so sudden and distinct that the finger about to touch the trigger was stayed.

The surgeon of Shasta looked over his shoulder, at the same time lowering the revolver that touched the sill.

The night was not so dark that he could not see objects a few feet distant, and his searching eyes saw the human figure whose step had warned him.

Immediately the look of Doctor Doc became a stare.

He knew the man who had come upon the scene.

Once seen, that form was easily told even in the light of the stars.

"What brings Shasta Sid back?" thought the doctor. "Did he find his master? No! the devil couldn't find the Croesus of the 'Frisco palace."

The man standing in the starlight was none other than the nabob's ferret—the tireless hunter of Colonel Teton's enemies, whoever they were.

Doctor Doc thought of turning upon him the six-shooter which had just been balked by the trail-hound's arrival.

Why not?

All at once, throwing up the weapon until it was on a level with Shasta Sid's head, the mountain doctor's body went forward, and he exclaimed:

"Hands up, or drop with them down!"

Shasta Sid was seen to fall back.

Was Doctor Doc's command the first intimation he had had of his presence?

"I mean it!" continued the Philistine, in the same tones. "Hands up. Captain Sid!"

There was no alternative.

In another moment two hands rose above the ferret's head, and before Doctor Doc knew what was coming he had taken a step forward.

"Halt!"

But Shasta Sid did not balt.

Stooping suddenly, he sprung along the ground at the Shasta surgeon, and the hands, in mid-air a moment before, caught first his pistol-wrist and then his throat, and nearly lifted him off his feet.

It was like the onset of a thunderbolt.

With wonder in his eyes and anxiety deep set in every lineament, Theo stood beside the table in the shanty with the doctor's diary of hate ready to drop from his hand.

He had heard the hissing "Hands up!" and the half-smothered exclamation of surprise which Shasta Sid's sudden charge had forced from the man he had caught.

Theo went to the door but did not open it.

"I may be involved in the play outside," said he, drawing back, "and I promised Stella to remain quiet."

If he had opened the door, as at first impelled to do, he would have seen the surgeon of Shasta in the vise-like clutch of Shasta Sid.

"My hands went up at your command, doctor!" laughed the yellow detective. "But they didn't remain up long. It's worth while risking something to catch you now! How do you like it?"

There was no answer beyond the gleaming eyes of the man who heard the nabob's ferret speak.

"Were you doing nothing more than looking in upon Captain Crimson's victim?" continued Shasta Sid. "Is this one of your diversions? Let me show you something that may turn your thoughts into another channel. Be tractable, Doctor Doc. There is something worse in California than a den of rattlers."

The avenging doctor gave his captor a quick and startling look.

Did the last sentence tell him that somebody had escaped?

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHERE THE STARS SHONE.

SHASTA SID'S eyes seemed to twinkle in response to the look he got from the man he had captured.

"You're the fish I spread my net for," he said to Doctor Doc. "I guess you're well gilled, and the meshes are pretty strong. Let us go."

The doctor of Shasta held back, but the grip at his throat suddenly loosened, and the hand which had been there thrust a six-shooter into his face.

"Come!" repeated the nabob's ferret.

Two men went down the street toward the mouth of Stella's bonanza.

"I know what has happened," thought one of them. "Shasta Sid has found his master. From the fire in his eye, he found him too late, and now he is taking vengeance. Go to the end of your tether, Captain Shasta, but there may be ruin there."

Beyond the last cabin the mountain detective halted and glanced at his prisoner.

"It was a clever trap, doctor," said he.

"Yours?"

"No; the one you built with weeks and weeks of labor, as if certain that the prey would come to it."

The California doctor smiled grimly.

"Well, what did you find?" he asked.

"The colonel, of course."

"In good condition, Shasta Sid?"

"Not very."

Another smile—a triumphant one—from the man who listened.

"How did you get to him?"

"Not by your iron door, of course."

"No?"

"From overhead."

Doctor Doc looked surprised.

"The mine is a regular honeycomb both above and below. Where did you catch the serpents?"

"Ah! you saw them, too?"

"Not all. I did not go down, but the colonel showed them to me by the light of his candle."

"Was—he—able—to—do—that?"

"Why not?"

Shasta Sid looked amused.

"Did you think the snakes had finished the nabob's career?"

Doctor Doc had thought nothing else.

"Barring a first-class scare, and with more gray on his head than he had a week ago, the nabob is in fair condition. He came up over the rope, leaving the snakes—those he had not killed—and the dead man to themselves."

"The dead man?"

"That's what I said."

"Who is the dead man?"

"Jubal."

The light of revelation seemed to break in upon the doctor's mind.

Jubal was Captain Buck's right bower—every-

body knew that—and the presence of his corpse in the serpent dungeon of the mountain mine appeared to throw light upon his master's visit to him after his return from the trap.

Doctor Doc wondered where Monte Cristo Teton was at that moment.

Was he waiting somewhere for Shasta Sid and his prisoner? Or, had the ferret been left to deal with him (the doctor) and credit the event to the nabob's account?

A few minutes afterward the doctor of Shasta was going deeper into the mountains with the California ferret.

His hands had been secured on his back and he was at the mercy of the man walking at his side, and he could see by glancing downward that the dark right hand still clutched the heavy "Colt."

"Is he taking me back to the mine?" mentally questioned Doctor Doc, as mile after mile of the trail lengthened behind them. "Maybe Colonel Teton waits for me there."

Shasta Sid halted at last.

They were no longer among the almost hidden paths of the mountain, but they stood on an open trail with the starry vault of heaven bending in beauty above them.

All the time Shasta Sid had watched his prisoner like a cat.

"Look across the trees below us, doctor," said the nabob's ferret, stretching forth his hand. "Those clustered lights are on your old stamping-ground; they are in Sunset City. They shine for Captain Buck and his fellow-rebels; for Stella, the richest waif of California—for Manon, who has come back, and for Theo, who has fought death and won."

The doctor seemed to gaze over the speaker's arm, and study the far-away lights which looked like fallen stars burning awhile on the ground before going out.

"Do you see them?" queried Shasta Sid.

"I see them."

"Look well at them. You see them for the last time!"

Doctor Doc, starting quickly, looked into the stern bronze face at his side.

"Am I to die like a tied dog?" he asked, his gaze wandering to the detective's revolver.

"Not here, at any rate," was the response.

"Where, then?"

"What! are you anxious?" smiled Shasta Sid. "Do you want to meet the last ordeal? So be it, Doctor Doc. We'll say good-night to the lights of the camp—for you, good-night forever."

Involuntarily the doctor looked once more over the tree-tops beneath him and far across the country beyond them.

Yes, the lights were in Sunset, where he had toiled and waited for his day of vengeance. Stella was there, watching over the man who had come between him and a secret hope, for when he had paid Colonel Teton back for the cruel deeds of Gulch Gideon, he intended to play a hand with Cupid for the heart of the girl Croesus.

Shasta Sid did not disturb his last glance, but stood a step aloof and let him have it out.

Doctor Doc turned suddenly upon his captor.

"I'm ready!" said he.

Once more the hand of the Shasta hound took his arm, and he saw the glimmering lamps of Sunset no more.

The two went up the open trail until by the rich starlight they could see where another crossed it.

"Now," said Shasta Sid, "I will turn you over to the late tenant of the trap."

The ferret stopped in the center of the crossed trails and placing one of his hands at his mouth sent a vociferous "Yo-ho-o-o-o!" through the mountain.

"A signal to Teton that he is here with me," flashed across Doctor Doc's mind.

The echo of the shout died speedily away, and a minute afterward the sharp glance of the avenging surgeon caught sight of a figure approaching over the trail on his left.

"I am here!" exclaimed a voice, as the man came up, and then leaning forward as he halted he uttered a cry of joy:

"You've caught the doctor!"

A thrill seemed to tingle every nerve in his body. He showed Doctor Doc the victorious face of his enemy—the man he had left to die in the depths of the old bonanza.

For a moment the two foes stood face to face without a word passing between them.

Less than five feet separated them.

"Two miracles, don't you think?" suddenly laughed Colonel Teton. "One man escapes from the sun and the vultures; the other eludes the poison of the serpents!"

There was no answer, but eye met eye fearless and cold in the war of looks.

"You should have made sure of me," continued Monte Cristo Teton. "A man can fight rattlesnakes successfully even when walled in with the monsters. A dead man, to start with, would have given you no further trouble."

Doctor Doc knew this now—when it was too late to remedy the blunder.

"I gave you a chance," he replied, with the semblance of a derisive smile at the corners of his mouth.

"A chance! Walled in with a lot of rattlers, the bite of one of which was death! Yes, a chance! But you, Captain Mazeppa, shall not have even one of its scope."

Monte Cristo Teton drew back.

"Go down the trail until I call, Shasta Sid," he said to his ferret, and the man walked away.

"Now, tell me what you meant," he went on, facing Doctor Doc again.

"What do you mean?"

"You told me during the ride to the mine that Manon's veins do not hold a drop of my blood."

"Ha! you have not forgotten that?"

"As if I could! Did you lie then, Doctor Doc?"

"I did not."

"And standing in the shadow of death, as you do now, do you reiterate the statement?"

"As God lives, I do."

Colonel Teton looked searchingly into the face before him.

"Tell me, then," cried he. "Whose blood is in the girl's veins?"

The doctor of Shasta seemed to smile.

"Who does she resemble?" he asked.

"The Tigress from the South—the wife of Delle Paso, who was found hanging headless from a stirrup in Echo Canyon by Captain Sid!"

"She is the image of that woman. You are right, Colonel Teton. You discovered that resemblance long ago, eh?"

"When Manon was a babe in her cradle."

"The change came suddenly, did it not?"

"In a night, as it were."

"I thought so! The babe resembled Nita at first—had her soft eyes, eh?"

"Yes!—yes!"

"Colonel Teton, where have your thoughts been all these years? While you were enriching yourself, picking up one fortune after another, and searching out for a third, didn't you stop to think that you were the victim of as cool a trick as was ever played?"

The 'Frisco nabob looked amazed.

"Do you tell me—"

He stopped like a man afraid to proceed.

"I've already said that Manon does not carry a drop of your blood in her body," rejoined Doctor Doc.

"Then, of course, she can't be Nita's child."

There was no answer, but the light that appeared in the doctor's eyes told the nabob that he was at the opening of the riddle.

"There was a substitution!" cried Monte Cristo Teton.

"You have said so."

"And your lips confirm it."

"They have not said that."

"Not in words, but I can draw the truth from words kept back. Who stole my child?"

"A fine question after what is before you!" exclaimed the Shasta doctor.

"The face I found in the cradle one morning tells me who played the card!" cried the nabob.

"It told me long ago."

"And you kept it from me?"

"Why not? I was waiting for you, you know."

In an instant a fierce change came over Colonel Teton's face.

"Thanks for the revelation," said he: "but it cannot stay the hand of vengeance, for the tortures of the serpent dugeon. You are Captain Mazeppa no longer; but the mad merciless doctor of Shasta, the man who for twenty years has plotted for my blood."

"And lost it by a blunder in the end!" replied the doctor bitterly.

A moment afterward the click of a revolver was heard, and Colonel Teton thrust it against the dark forehead before him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A REVELATION.

THE doctor of Shasta stood erect and gazed calmly into the gleaming eyeballs and white face of his mortal foe.

Shasta Sid, standing down the trail, caught the sharp click of the six-shooter and ran forward almost noiselessly.

"No!" suddenly exclaimed Monte Cristo Teton, lowering the weapon. "I can't blow a defenseless man into eternity, no matter what he may have done to me."

There was no answer.

"Shasta?" called the voice of the nabob.

In a second the California ferret had reached the spot.

"Cut his bonds," continued Teton, pointing to the prisoner.

A knife gleamed for an instant in the starlight and Doctor Doc's bonds fell apart.

Colonel Teton still held the cocked weapon in his right hand.

"Take him away, Shasta, past the spot where you were awhile ago, and round the bend in the trail."

Shasta Sid's eyes looked a question.

"What! are you going to spare him?" they said.

However, he took the Shasta doctor's arm.

"Don't go too far with your leniency," spoke Doctor Doc. "I am still the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert!"

"I don't overlook that fact."

"I may not appreciate this sudden change of heart."

"Go! do your duty, Shasta!" and Monte Cristo Teton turned his back on his late prisoner, and coolly walked away.

For a minute, with his lips welded, Doctor Doc gazed after him, and Shasta Sid saw, or thought he did, the workings of his mind through his eyes.

"If you will take the risk, all right!" cried the doctor. "Your ferret here is witness to the fact that I did not ask for mercy."

Whether Colonel Teton heard him or not he did not know, for no answer was returned, and before the figure of the nabob had vanished he was walking away with Shasta Sid.

"He told me something at the last moment which placed me in his debt," smiled the nabob when the detective came back.

"I thought nothing could have saved him."

"Nothing but what he told me. What did he say when you parted?"

"Nothing."

"Not a word?"

"Not a word. He touched his hat—nothing more. I left him then."

"Well, we are shut of him."

"Do you think so?"

"For the time, at least."

Shasta Sid said no more.

"If you can afford to set free the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert, colonel, I shall not complain," he thought. "But you will see more of him. Before this game ends, if I am not mistaken, you will wish you had painted the rocks about with Doctor Doc's brains."

"Now for the female tigress!" exclaimed Colonel Teton. "We left her in the darkness of the mine. With this huntress silenced—but she must unravel a mystery before it comes to that, we can play the final hand for the big bonanza of Shasta Land."

"For Stella's mine?"

"Yes."

"Do you think the girl can be tempted?"

"The 'Frisco nabob let a light laugh ripple over his lips."

"Not that, perhaps, but I will net the prize for all. In the first place, I want to see Lady Leone, the child-stealer."

The last words drew a sharp and sudden stare from Shasta Sid.

"You look at me?" smiled the Cresus. "Did I say something that startled you?"

"You called the woman a child-stealer."

"So I did. You have heard her rightly named."

"Was that the revelation that cut the doctor's cords?"

"Ah! what a shrewd fellow you are!" cried Teton. "Where, think you, we will find the tigress?"

"On the trail."

"Playing shadow—a game she has not relinquished a moment all these years."

He stopped as he finished and gazed strangely at his fox.

"Shasta Sid, have you ever wondered why that woman has shadowed and hated me?" he asked.

They had left the narrow pathway and stood on an open spot of ground far below which they could see the little basin which terminated where Sunset City began.

Shasta Sid made no reply.

"You don't speak," continued Colonel Teton.

"I have never sought to know your secrets," was the reply.

"That is true. You have known nothing but obedience to my commands. I said 'find Delle Paso, Lady Leone and Teton Sam,' and you have obeyed. Delle Paso you found headless in the canyon before I came to Shasta, the woman you ferreted out a little later, and Teton Sam, the least dangerous member of the trio, because he has turned against Leone, is somewhere among these hills looking for her for vengeance. When the game has been played out the reward will come."

Shasta Sid bowed his head.

"That woman and I have been enemies a long time," the nabob resumed, seeming to be in a communicative mood. "When I was younger I was not called Monte Cristo Teton. I had a ranch in the then new Southwest. Lone Star Ranch was the best in the whole country, and therefore the marked one for the raiders and foragers of the border."

"My cattle disappeared; my best horses vanished; my hunting dogs were poisoned. I organized against the scoundrels. We ranchers went together—banded for mutual protection. Here and there we caught a suspicious and shiftless fellow, convened Judge Lynch's court and strung him up. I guess we didn't get any innocent ones. One night my men brought to the ranch a young man who had been caught in the timber along the river. He had a lasso in his hands, and three Mexican bits on his person. Besides being armed, he carried a wild, devil-may-care gleam in his eyes, and when questioned would say nothing about himself more than deny that he was a horse-thief."

"We had hanged two confessed thieves the night before, and one had implicated a young

fellow who answered the description of the man we had just taken. My men were positive that we had the captain of the raiders, and I was equally so, though I did not like the thought of pulling up a young fellow like that. Well, the upshot of the whole matter was that we convened our court again and tried him as we had the others. He never murmured. We hung him to the big tree which had borne gallows fruit before, and the next day my head ranchman cut the body down and gave it burial. One week later, Rio Rob, the ranchman just mentioned, was found dead on the trail with a paper bearing the words: 'For my brother!' pinned to his shirt. After that, at intervals of a few days, the other members of our last court met the same fate, until I was the only person left who had taken a hand in the death of the young raider.

"Of course these deeds aroused and mystified the whole country. It was certain that a close relative of the young man was at work, but our best hunters failed to unearth him. On the breast of the last man killed we found a paper saying that the master—meaning me—would be tortured from time to time—played with as a cat plays with the mouse it has caught before it kills it.

"Not long afterward I sold my ranch, but not until I had accidentally made the discovery that the body of the young raider had disappeared from the grave. You may know what became of me after the sale of the ranch?" and Colonel Teton gazed curiously at the man who had not missed a word of his narrative. "You have heard of Gulch Gideon. I was he. I became the bonanza prince of the little region which terminates at the edge of the Devil's Desert on the north. You've heard of me as Gulch Gideon, Shasta Sid?"

"I have," answered the mountain ferret frankly. "I could not help putting this and that together, now and then, and it was not hard for me to find the link which connects Colonel Teton and Gulch Gideon."

The 'Frisco nabob smiled.

"Well, the threat of the avenger of the dead boy was carried out," he continued. "The years brought her out of the shadows and showed me that the avenger was a woman who, as Lady Leone, the beautiful tigress, has given you employment so long. You know how you picked up, link by link, her history: how her husband, Delle Paso, came to hate me with all her vehemence; how she drew one Teton Sam into her snare; how the three, working together, flooded a mine in the Gold River country and fired the flume of the Bulldog Bonanza in Lower Sonoma. All through my life since the hanging of that boy on Lone Star Ranch, I have felt, at frequent intervals, the hand of his merciless sister."

"To-night I unraveled the coolest piece of work of all—the most consummate bit of villainy that ever sprung from a woman's brain. Doctor Doc told me. Shasta Sid, there isn't a drop of my blood in Manon's veins!"

The California ferret did not stir.

"I do not surprise you," proceeded Colonel Teton.

"No."

"Then you know that Nita's babe was taken from her crib—"

"I know that, with her face—with her blood—she could not be Nita's offspring."

"The tigress-woman did it!" cried the nabob. "I have told you how, in a night, as it were, the babe's countenance changed; how, from that time, I hated her; how I once went to the nursery fully determined to strangle her, but found the nurse on guard. I know the truth now. Leone stole my child and substituted her own!"

"A clever trick," smiled Shasta Sid.

"Clever enough to make her Queen of Tartarus!" cried Colonel Teton. "It was a trick of tricks. Now, you know why I want to meet the avenger. I want to force from her the whereabouts of my true heir. I want to push the tiger-blooded witch aside, and make her wish I had throttled her in her cradle. Come! Back to Sunset! The game ends there. There the hand of the 'Frisco nabob strikes for justice!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A CHAMPION'S MOUTH.

WHILE Colonel Teton and his detective were talking thus in the soft and brilliant starlight a party of five masked men were nearing a certain ravine some miles from the scene we have just left.

Their masks proclaimed them the Shadows of Shasta. There were six when the complement was full, but on this occasion one was missing, and the five riding leisurely over the trail looked both mysterious and grotesque.

At length they reached the opening of the place where we saw Teton Sam fall, at the threshold of his revenge, by a bullet from Manon's revolver.

A little further on the foremost Shadow reined in his steed.

"Halt! Here he is!"

The rest of the party drew up, and all gazed upon the stalwart body which lay where it had fallen.

A minute's silence followed.

Suddenly the discoverer of the corpse dismounted.

"Shot!" he exclaimed, looking up at his companions. "Shot in the heart."

A few seconds later the band moved on again, the body of Teton Sam lying across the saddle of one of the five, and in this manner they vanished as strangely as they had appeared.

A mile or two from the spot they scooped out a grave for Manon's victim, and standing over it with their masks off and their dark faces revealed, they swore to pay the slayer back.

Why should the Shadows of Shasta avenge Teton Sam? What was he to them that, in the light of the stars and with uplifted hands, they should swear to deal terribly and without mercy with the owner of the hand which had taken his life?

Their actions point to but one conclusion.

Teton Sam had lived another life since he staggered from Lady Leone's revolver in the far Southwest.

He was the captain of the Shasta Shadows. It was a part of his private revenge when Delle Paso was sent down Echo Canyon, headless, and dangling from the stirrup of his black horse. Shasta Sid, bending over the body he had cut loose, did not dream that the work of the Shadows was the vengeance of Teton Sam.

The masked riders had only found their own. They had picked up their leader with a bullet-hole in his breast, hence the oath which only the stars heard.

They rode from the spot after having piled a few stones above the dead.

"The woman did this," they said. "The wife of Delle Paso—the pistol witch of the Southwest—turned on him and shot him down like a dog. We will find her! Captain Sam sha'n't sleep unavenged!" And so they rode on until they vanished like specters among the dark shadows of the night.

By and by they urged their horses into a gallop, and sweeping along a wider trail, reached a spot from which they could overlook the shanties of Sunset.

It was past midnight, and but one light, and that a dim one, showed the Shadows where the camp lay.

"If," said one, "the nabob is down there, she can't be far off. The vulture never quits the quarry until it has had its feast. But we don't know what has happened since Blonde Buck's rebellion."

Some of his companions shook their heads.

"They may have hanged Colonel Teton to the pole on the Square," the speaker went on. "Captain Buck is cool and exacting. He is a man who does not yield an inch. If they have rid themselves of the nabob, the woman we are looking for won't be found there."

"How will we find out?"

"I will go down."

The new leader of the Shadows dismounted and removed his white hood.

"Wait for me here," he resumed, and they saw him disappear.

Let us follow the Shadow spy.

It did not take him long to reach Sunset City. He had but to keep straight down the mountain, and when on a level with the camp to push forward on a trail which he found there.

He followed the street that led to the light the band had sighted from the elevated trail. It drew him to a cabin whose window showed him the sleeping form of the young Philistine on his cot.

Stella was not keeping her vigils then.

"He doesn't die worth a cent!" thought the Shadow, grinning while he spoke. "Something better than doctors is pulling him through. I wish 'im good luck. One don't pick up a bonanza every day—not one o' the sort he's found. I guess not!" And the face was withdrawn, and the spy of the Shadows glided away.

Not far from the spot he shrunk toward one of the shanties and looked at the person whose footsteps sounding clearly on the crisp night air had saluted his ears.

Tall and stalwart of frame was the nocturnal prowler, and the Shadow like those of his kind watched him with one hand resting upon the butt of his revolver.

"That," muttered he, "is the nabob's ferret!"

If the discovered man was Shasta Sid, back again in the mountain camp, he was giving the Shadow a good chance to study him.

When he moved away at last the eyes of the avenger followed him, and then he became a nimble and noiseless watch-dog at his very heels.

Shasta Sid went to the cabin given to Manon through the generosity of Blonde Buck. It was dark and silent.

He halted at the door and listened with his ear glued to it for a few moments.

"Who's in thar?" mentally asked the Shadow.

Presently the hand of Shasta Sid found the latch and pressed it down. A click barely audible was the result.

The next moment the door opened and the head of the nabob's spy was thrust inside.

Another minute and he was across the step and the Shadow had lost sight of him.

Shasta Sid soon came out with a movement

which told that the cabin was empty. He looked disappointed, for all his caution had yielded nothing.

"She may come back, but I can't wait," the Shadow spy heard him growl. "The colonel must have looked elsewhere for her because I can't find her at home."

A strange look lit up the watcher's eyes.

Was Shasta Sid looking for Lady Leone, the woman wanted by the Shadows of Shasta for the killing of Teton Sam?

Then, the woman had become a citizen of Sunset! Then, they would know where to look for her.

"It is a race between us and the nabob and his spy!" exclaimed the Shadow. "Well, if they beat us they will have to hustle!" and he seemed to laugh to himself as Shasta Sid moved away.

He let the mountain ferret go and went back toward the point at which he had entered the camp.

"Halt!"

The word, ringing out clear and ominous on the night air, brought him to a full stop and fished his six-shooter half-way from his belt.

"You're across the dead-line!" continued the same voice. "This is Stella's ground and not Philistia. Come up!"

He moved toward the man, who topped him by several inches, and looking over the leveled revolver and into his face saw a flowing beard, and a dark but good-natured countenance.

"Ah! you're not one o' them?" queried the big man. "Don't b'long to either side, I see."

"I do not."

"Whar from?"

"From the mountains."

"Passing through, eh?"

"Yes."

The weapon came down.

"I am the Tall Redwood, and Stella's mine-boss," continued the large man. "You don't know much about the feud?"

"Nothing. Have you a feud hyer?"

"We have. The storm that began well has quailed down. It was among themselves, and we war waitin' to take a hand in it when the right time came. Guess it won't come now. Do you have to go on right away?"

"No."

"Can stop awhile, eh?"

"I can."

The following moment the Shadow was walking beside the Tall Redwood toward the mouth of Queen Stella's bonanza.

The big overseer led the way to one of the chambers, lighted a candle which he placed in a wooden candlestick, and, folding his arms, began to talk.

For the next ten minutes the spy did nothing but listen.

He let the Tall Redwood tell the whole story of the feud of the camp, and found his interest in no wise abated when he came down to Colonel Teton's coming and to later events.

"I'll get something here," thought the Shadow.

The Tall Redwood seemed to omit nothing.

The candle, not a very long one at the outset, burned to the wooden stick and flickered, but the Redwood's tongue rattled on.

"It's just this," said he solemnly, "if Doctor Doc don't finish Colonel Teton the woman will."

"But the nabob's spy?" suggested the Shadow.

"He will play his hand for his master. If he finds Lady Leone, he will take her to Teton, and then all others who have an account to settle with her will never get to balance the books. The girl is like her, they say—enough like her to be her daughter, but she is the colonel's heir."

"And his daughter?"

The Tall Redwood started from the wall against which he leaned while he spun his story and leered strangely at the Shadow.

"I've got an opinion of my own," said he, smiling. "A dove's egg never produces a hawk neither does a gazelle breed a tiger."

"You are right, Captain Redwood."

"The Redwood family grow tall but never grow wrong!" laughed Stella's overseer.

"Then, you think that the girl called Manon is not the colonel's child?"

"I say I have an opinion," was the answer.

"Where is she?"

"Probably asleep in the shanty Captain Buck gave her. But Stella's the queen for us! The beautiful owner of this bonanza is the woman hated by Philistia—the person whose mine lured Colonel Teton and his spy from 'Frisco. If she had what I believe are her rights, she'd be more than Stella of Shasta."

"What more?"

"You ar' a stranger an' I can't tell you everything."

The Shasta Shadow smiled, but the Tall Redwood's mouth had shut with a snap like the lid of a box.

It was locked.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BOLDEST PLAY OF ALL.

THE expression that overspread the Shadow's countenance when the Tall Redwood so suddenly changed his tactics was ludicrous in the extreme.

"Caution came a little too late," he mentally

exclaimed. "I've picked up something I did not expect to find," and then seeing that the Champion was not going to resume he announced his immediate departure.

The overseer accompanied him to the edge of the bonanza where, touching hats, they separated, the Tall Redwood remaining there and the spy going toward the mountains.

He had failed to discover the woman believed to be guilty of Teton Sam's death, but that failure should not be the end of his hunt.

He went back to the men waiting for him on the trail.

"Fool! it wasn't my work," exclaimed a woman who looking down from a rock under which the Shadow passed to his companions in the light of a morning moon. "You avengers must be careful who you hunt, and if you touch the person who sent Teton Sam to his just account there will be another settlement!"

The Shadow joined his fellow-Shadows; there was a brief consultation, which the motionless woman overheard, and then the whole party rode away.

Morning, throwing her beams once more over the rough Shasta region, saw the Nabob of 'Frisco pacing back and forth in a small gulch whose walls of solid stone rose above him near a thousand feet.

"Why don't he come? I should have known something ere this," he muttered, impatiently, gazing at a small opening some rods distant.

"Is Doctor Doc back in his old place? Has Leone come to Sunset? Is Manon there? What keeps my ferret?"

Presently there entered the ravine, at the spot which he had watched with so much interest, a man, who at sight of him quickened his step.

It was Shasta Sid.

The nabob's eyes brightened in a moment.

"Go straight to the facts," said he, as the detective came up. "I have been on nettles for three hours."

Sid shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Manon is not there," he began.

"Gone away, eh?"

"It seems so."

"Well, what else?"

The storm has passed. Six dead men will not be avenged. Blonde Buck is now the autocrat of Philistia."

"The rebellion succeeded, then?"

"It seems so."

"That weighs against me."

Sid shook his head doubtfully.

"What! don't you think so?" cried Colonel Teton.

"I do not. Those men must have a master. Crimson Clint has deserted them. They want a ruling spirit."

"Even Captain Buck?"

"Even the head mutineer."

The Californian seemed to reflect for a moment.

"Would I do?" he asked, with a smile.

"Would you be afraid to risk it?"

"With a bonanza like the Rattlesnake on the scales?" he exclaimed. "No!"

"Men of their kind are strange creatures," continued Captain Sid. "But," he added, with a smile, "if Blonde Buck could be made to believe that, for his assistance, you might not oppose him in a certain matter, you are safe."

"What do you mean?"

"One sometimes hears a good deal of importance if he listens at the right door," was the answer.

"And you found the right door last night, eh?"

"I think so."

"Was it Captain Buck's door, Shasta?"

"It was his."

"Tell me."

"Blonde Buck has an eye to business. He wants to play king-maker, not to be king himself."

"Well?"

"This Philistine leader has a little love affair on his hands. He thinks thus: 'If I could win the good graces of Colonel Teton by setting him up here, as owner of the girl's bonanza, I might become the husband of the dark-eyed, tiger-blooded Manon.'"

"Great heavens!" cried the 'Frisco nabob, with a start. "Then he has his eyes on Manon?"

"She is the stake of the cunning game he plays."

"I see. The man—Jubal—was his right bower. Had Jubal rescued me, I should have found out that Captain Buck had sent him out for that purpose, and that I ought to thank him, and not Jubal."

"Precisely," grinned Sid.

"An odd way to woo, but a cunning one. Captain Buck is no fool."

"Not when he plays for himself, colonel."

"This is an unexpected card for us. Fortune has filled our hand with trumps, and it needs but a little courage to play them. Captain Buck can have the tiger-blooded girl. She is no longer an heir of mine, but we won't repudiate her so long as we can use her to make us masters of Sunset. To whom did Captain Buck disclose his plan?"

"To a Philistine called Cactus Carl. Jubal has not returned, and his master is uneasy. He

will wait until sunrise, and then Carl takes the trail."

"With Manon missing, and Doctor Doc away, we might make our appearance?"

"Yes."

"Once intrenched in camp, with Blonde Buck and his men at my back, the tables will have been completely turned in our favor. This is victory, Shasta Sid."

"Now or never, colonel."

"Then be it now!"

The sun was not high in the heavens when a dozen men in the mountain camp beheld Colonel Teton the nabob enter it, and with his cool ferret walk straight to Blonde Buck's cabin and open the door.

The captain of the rebels, and now the master spirit of Philistia, gave vent to a startling exclamation of surprise when he beheld the figure of the nabob darken his doorway.

The two men for a moment stood face to face without a word.

"I have come to the bravest man in Shasta Land," said Teton. "Hunted by enemies from whose traps I have providentially escaped, I seek one who has been accused of plotting against me, but whom I have never condemned. I ask nothing better than the friendship of Captain Buck of Sunset. Let him give me a moment's respite from the plots of my foes, and I will return the favor a thousandfold."

Blonde Buck's eyes brightened in spite of his self-control.

What more could he have wished? Fortune had played into his hands, and now if he did not reap the harvest, it was his own fault.

"I've never turned my back on a hunted man," said he. "The rebellion into which I was drawn to a certain extent—"

"Let that pass!" interrupted the nabob. "I have come to talk of the present, and to look to the future. Give me a breathing spell here; let me prepare for the enemy, and the man who stands by me shall never regret it."

Thus the captain of the mutineers became the champion of the man against whom a few days before he had risen in rebellion. Shasta Sid had stated the case clearly—the toughs of Shasta were fickle.

It did not take long for the whole camp to know that the 'Frisco nabob had come back.

More than this, it was made to understand that Captain Buck had gone over to him, and that Teton and not Crimson Clint was to be the real king of the region.

And how did they take to it?

Some shook their heads at first and probably remembered the six men newly laid away in the graveyard on the mountain-side. They gathered in groups and discussed the nabob's return in all its phases; they said he had not given up all hopes of getting hold of Queen Stella's bonanza, that he had come back to play a shrewd hand for it, and so on.

When they saw him appear on the street alongside of Captain Buck, they knew that the alliance had been effected, and those who thought of the captain's kindness to Manon knew that he had his eye upon the hand and fortune of the nabob's heir.

"What brings him back in the teeth of what has happened?" asked Theo, the young Philistine, gazing from his cot upon Stella who had dropped in to tell him all she knew about the nabob's return.

Theo became interested from the first.

"My mine is the stake—nothing more nor less," said the girl in reply to the query.

"You must hold it, Stella. The Nabob of 'Frisco will play his big and last cards now. I see trouble—even death—ahead."

Stella's face grew troubled.

"Not that, I hope, Theo."

"I can see nothing else. Doctor Doc will come again. Lady Leone who has baffled the nabob before will not give him up. He is backed by the ruling power of Philistia—Captain Buck. The man who trained the Winchester on Crimson Clint's adherents because they stood by their leader who had become Colonel Teton's friend has now formed a treaty of amity with him."

"I see that."

"I never saw a bolder play, Stella. The gold king of 'Frisco has the desperate courage of the lion. He makes a bulwark of Blonde Buck and his men. He will have friends in Sunset when the avenging doctor—the Mazepa of the Devil's Desert—seeks to get even. When Lady Leone strikes again he will be intrenched."

The girl Croesus did not reply.

She went to the window and looked out.

Approaching the cabin were the two allies—Blonde Buck and Colonel Teton.

The girl fixed her gaze upon the latter.

"You can't have it, Colonel Teton, I say no!" she said through set teeth.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AT STELLA'S HOUSE.

BEFORE the sun had reached his noonday point in the zenith Manon came quickly back.

She appeared not to have heard of Colonel Teton's return though the prominent figure of Shasta Sid in front of the "hotel" on the square ought to have prepared her for it.

It was not long, however, before Captain Buck arrived at the house and broke the news.

"I don't want to see him," replied Manon.

"What, not see your father?"

The tiger-blooded beauty burst into a derisive laugh.

"Does he call himself that?" she queried.

"Why not?" rejoined Blonde Buck, perplexed.

"Because I don't believe I have a drop of his blood in me!"

The new captain of Philistia looked amazed.

"We won't discuss this question now," added Manon. "It isn't a pleasant subject to me, and it seems to trouble you. Is Colonel Teton still playing for Stella's bonanza?"

"I do not know."

"Then, what brings him back to Sunset? He and his spy know the road to 'Frisco. He has, somehow or other, escaped the clutches of Doctor Doc. Does he wait for his old enemy here?"

"I have not sought to know his plans, Miss Manon."

"He wasn't in good odor when he went away. Now he walks the street in daylight with the captain of the growlers at his side."

Blonde Buck flushed to the temples, though Manon spoke good-naturedly, showing her teeth the while.

"He can't buy the girl's bonanza," she went on. "Stella will hold out against all his offers. Can he afford to fight for the prize?"

"He comes back for rest. He has enemies at his heels."

"So he has!" exclaimed Manon. "He has Doctor Doc there, and Lady Leone—the tigress who looks like me."

Blonde Buck said nothing. He had heard this before.

"They will find him here," she soon resumed. "His ferret can't make a successful bulwark. Shasta Sid is cunning and fearless. He serves Monte Cristo Teton like a slave; but the old feud will be settled in spite of him."

Half an hour later Captain Buck entered a small apartment occupied by Colonel Teton, whose look told that he was waiting for some one.

"Well, I've seen the girl," said the Philistine.

"Stella?" exclaimed the nabob with a start.

"No, the other one."

"Ha! the jungle-blooded creature—the one I had not the courage to strangle?"

"Yes."

"And what does she say?"

Captain Buck told the story of his visit.

"She knows it, then, does she?"

"She thinks so."

"Well, I can make her my heir, even if it all be true, and against her will at that."

Blonde Buck looked pleased.

"Doctor Doc has come back," said a voice that moment at the door, and Colonel Teton, springing from the cot upon which he reclined, half drew a revolver as he uttered the one word:

"Where?"

"He has gone quietly to his shanty," answered the Philistine.

The nabob gave Captain Buck a quick glance.

"Every movement of the doctor can be watched," said the Philistine captain. "He is alone now."

"Good!" exclaimed Teton.

"He will soon discover that you are not friendless, and that his attempt to get even will result in his snuffing out. Sunset City can get along without its doctor, and the vultures would not refuse the feast we might hang up for them in Echo Canyon."

The nabob waited impatiently for Blonde Buck's pause.

"The demon of vengeance lurks in that man's bosom," said he. "Give him a chance. Let him show his spirit. Shasta Sid is here."

At that moment the stalwart form of the mountain ferret appeared in the doorway.

"The wolf is still on the war-path," grinned Shasta Sid.

"He has come for the final trial of strength."

"For the last tussle."

"I ask for nothing better," smiled Colonel Teton, and then Blonde Buck, retiring, left the Croesus and his ferret alone.

The warm day passed lazily.

As if expecting some exciting play in the game on hand, the sound of picks in the mines had been stilled, and the Champions gazed across the line in the sand wondering when and where the storm would break.

The long shadows falling at last found everything to all appearance peaceful and settled.

The main den of Philistia trimmed its lights and received its old friends. The tables were soon in use once more, and the dirty cards fell here and there to the jingle of coin and the clashing of mountain oaths.

Monte Cristo Teton opened the little door of Captain Buck's shanty and then came out.

He kept one hand where its fingers could touch the butt of a six-shooter, and as he left the cabin he threw a sidelong glance toward the "hotel" on the square.

The next cabin to it on the right was Doctor Doc's, but the window sent forth no light showing that the avenging Esculapius of Sunset was at that moment at home.

The California nabob gazed for a moment toward the cabin and then moved away.

"I have played to win," muttered he. "There is a million at stake, and if I let the trail wolves set their fangs in me again I am lost. I have Blonde Buck and his minions at my back. I had them against me not long ago, but the tide has turned. Doctor Doc has not forgotten the Mazepa of the Devil's Desert, nor the wife I won when we played against one another in the South. Neither has the woman buried her hate. The changed child is lost, but she must reveal the secret before she dies. I will force it from her, and then destroy the tigress of the California desert!"

He looked no longer at the doctor's shanty, but went across the divide and rapped at a certain door on Stella's territory.

The face he saw when the portal was opened greeted him with a look of surprise.

It was Stella's!

"Let us not begin an interview, if 'trade' is to be talked," said the girl Croesus.

The 'Frisco nabob seemed to start. He had come to talk nothing else.

"I want a few words—not more," and he crossed the threshold and halted in the light of her lamp.

The girl at first seemed on the eve of resenting the intrusion, but she finally stepped aside and waited.

"I have come to play open and fair," Teton went on. "I want your mine but I want it by fair means. I add one hundred thousand to my first offer."

"That is no temptation."

"It would have been once."

"It would have succeeded," smiled Stella, and then her fair face, almost colorless, grew resolute. "I will not sell."

"Not at all?"

"Not at all."

Under his dark mustache the 'Frisco millionaire bit his lip.

"Colonel Teton, you are too poor to buy me out," she continued.

"Not too poor, but unable to overcome the infernal hand which comes between us!"

"No hand has interposed," answered Stella calmly.

"Not hers?" cried the nabob. "It stopped the trade before. The message which I now know Gold Gomez brought up from the South did the work. You obeyed the commands of the tiger-blooded creature who has played against me and my fortunes these twenty years. By what mysterious power does she control you, girl?"

"By none," was the response.

"By heavens! she holds you in her grip and works you to her purpose."

"They say she looks like your daughter."

In a moment Colonel Teton became ashen.

"It is false!" he cried. "The tigress looks like none of mine! I have thrown aside the creature called Manon. I have regretted the moment I went to the nursery to throttle her and did not. That creature the daughter of Monte Cristo Teton? If it were not for your sex, girl, I'd resent the charge."

Stella did not lose her head.

"The cause of Lady Leone is nothing to me," she answered, calmly. "If I received a message from her by Gold Gomez, and it was obeyed in the nick of time I may have cause to thank her."

"Then you may weep over the end of the woman of the desert!"

"That end has not yet come."

There seemed a taunt in the girl's words.

"I have never failed to win my games. Sooner or later the plum drops into Teton's lap. It never falls until it is ripe. I am not friendless here."

"I see that. You have drawn to you those who were crying for your blood a few days ago."

Colonel Teton's lip curled with a proud smile.

"Will they stand by you?" continued Stella. "Captain Clint deserted you in your hour of need—fled like a coward when he discovered that the man whom he once helped to send across the Devil's Desert was Doctor Doc. There is something in a cool trigger and a swift bullet that weakens the bravest desperado. At heart—for all his outward seeming—Crimson Clint, master of the Philistines, was the veriest coward on earth."

"Let him go!" exclaimed Colonel Teton. "I play my own game with better material."

"With the man who has been your ferret for years?"

"With the faithful Shasta Sid!"

"The man yonder?"

Monte Cristo Teton looked toward the door, and saw there the form of Shasta Sid, whose look took him forward.

"She has come," whispered Shasta.

Colonel Teton started.

"Leone?" he asked.

"Leone!"

"Where is the tigress?" And his look was fierceness itself.

"I think we can find her," was the reply, as Shasta Sid's hand closed on his arm.

The nabob glanced over his shoulder, and said

"Good-night" to Stella; then, as he turned away with Shasta Sid, a loud report rung out on the night air, and the next instant the California Croesus broke from his companion and pitched back into the light!

Captain Shasta, with revolver cocked, leaned forward with welded lips.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CLOSING GRIP.

At first the mountain ferret saw no one, but in a moment a moving figure a few feet away caught his eager eye.

"Ho!" he muttered. "Not the tigress, but the doctor!"

By this time the monte room not very far from the scene of the shooting was deserted, the players had sprung into the street, and were wondering who had fired the shot, and if it meant another tenant of the graveyard on the hill.

"You will find him back yonder!" said the man who had come out of the night, and for a moment faced the group. "The ride across the Devil's Desert is avenged at last! He escaped from my serpent-haunted trap; but I got him at last!" And the speaker was permitted to disappear, though the gamblers knew that he was Doctor Doc, and that he still held the mischievous revolver in his hand.

Shasta Sid, strange to say, had let the doctor go, and that when he could have shot him dead in his tracks.

"A man like him can't get far when I want him," thought he, and thinking that his place was beside the nabob, he went back into Stella's house.

"Didn't you stop the tigress?" exclaimed Colonel Teton.

The Croesus of 'Frisco, instead of lying in the lamplight a corpse, leaned against the wall with a face white as marble and eyes madly set.

"It was not Leone," answered Shasta Sid.

"Ha! not that huntress? The doctor, then?"

"The doctor."

"Paying an old debt, Captain Shasta!" grinned the nabob. "This is what I get for sparing him when we had him in our grip."

The detective said nothing.

There was an excited crowd at the door. Forgetting the dead-line, a dozen Philistines had invaded the girl-miner's territory and were filling the air with threats of vengeance and oaths.

But when they discovered that it was the nabob who had stopped the bullet, there was a sudden change in the number and frequency of their threats, for though Blonde Buck had espoused Teton's cause, his followers did not take kindly to him.

Shasta Sid helped the nabob home.

Doctor Doc had left the camp, and even then was among the mountains with victory quickening his pulse and giving animation to his movements.

Colonel Teton with his wound bandaged as best it could be done, the ball having plowed its way through his arm near the shoulder, lay on a cot in Blonde Buck's cabin with his eyes fastened on the door directly before him.

"I can send Shasta to the trail," said he. "The devilish doctor may escape for a time; but we will catch him in the end. I have not done with the Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert."

He knew that Captain Buck and his best men were in council across the way, that Shasta Sid was looking for the woman who was reported in camp, and now, the sole tenant of the Philistine's cabin, he was waiting for one if not two reports.

Suddenly there came to the door a footstep which his quick ears caught.

It was not the heavy-footed foot of a gold tough, but the light tread so suggestive of tiger claws and panther teeth.

It seemed to die away at the door itself.

Immediately the nabob transferred his gaze to the window.

At the same time his hand moved toward the tumbled pillow beneath which lay the six-shooter which he kept for any foe that might come.

Another minute passed, and then there appeared at the window, pressed against the glass, as it were, a face which drew a cry of horror from him.

It was not Manon's face, though strangely like hers. It was an older face, with the eyes deep and full of fire—eyes which he knew on sight.

Colonel Teton caught the revolver suddenly and got up.

As he left the cot on the floor the face vanished and the door opened.

"Not a word, Colonel Teton!" said the person who appeared to his gaze before he could find his tongue. "The Mazeppa of the Devil's Desert failed, but I will not!"

Shasta Sid had missed Lady Leone, and she had come for him.

The Tigress of the Southwest shut the door behind her.

She was alone with the enemy of twenty years.

"They won't get in until too late, if they come," she went on. "The council is a bit

stormy, and I grew tired of listening. Now sit down, or listen as you are."

Colonel Teton saw the polished barrel that extended beyond the woman's hand.

"I'll let her talk as long as she pleases," thought he. "The council may break up, or Shasta Sid come. Either event means salvation, no matter what she says." And then, looking at Lady Leone, he said:

"Go on!"

"You have thrown the child off," began the avenger.

"Why shouldn't I? She isn't mine!"

"Ha! you think so at last, do you?"

"I know it!"

"Well," laughed Leone, "it took you a long time to find out."

"Yes; but if I had known it before to-night my hands would have rendered you childless!"

"Me, Colonel Teton?"

"Yes. The accursed likeness names Manon's mother."

The woman laughed again, as derisively as before.

"Where is my child?" demanded the 'Frisco nabob. "Your hands robbed the nest and substituted a tigress cub of your own."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it now."

"And you want your own?"

"I do."

"To have her hate you as Manon has done?"

"A person with your blood in her veins cannot love. It is impossible!"

"And so you want your child?" Lady Leone spoke slowly and in a voice that seemed to torture the impatient nabob. "You want to take to your heart the little one whom you thought to rear as the greatest heiress in 'Frisco? Come, Colonel Teton; let us talk about the one crime which made me the tigress you call me."

"My child first!" persisted the nabob advancing a step.

"Halt! curb your impatience, or your child, never!" was the answer.

"Does she live?"

"Do you think I would raise the babe of the man who made me what I am to-night—a merciless creature whose oath, taken years and years ago, is not yet fulfilled?"

"A thousand deaths to you if you took the babe's life!"

"And what to the ranch king whose rope strangled the boy horse-hunter in the South?"

There was no reply.

"Some would think it a long step from girlhood, bright and joyous, to the restless, always-trailing woman; but I took it in a single night. You prospered, with here and there a little break—now and then a flooded mine, or a flume in the flames."

"Your work, woman!" broke in Colonel Teton.

"Did Shasta Sid find me out?" laughed Lady Leone. "Never mind. These little breaks in your career did not stop you; the 'Frisco palace grew, your coffers filled; new bonanzas fell by the way; but all the time there hung over your success the shadow of the ranch-rope. It is fairly over your path once more. It is there for the last time, Colonel Teton."

Leone had barely ceased when a face, surrounded by a wide-brimmed hat, passed the window.

The nabob's heart seemed to stand still.

The council had broken up, for the hat, or the glimpse he had had of it, looked wondrously like Blonde Buck's, with its rattlesnake band.

"We are back to the present," continued Leone, not noticing the look which had caught the passing sombrero. "I have come up from Lone Star Ranch where the noose choked the boy horse-hunter for Gulch Gideon."

At that moment the polished revolver covered the man in front of the cot, and the hat passed the window again.

"One of her minions," thought Colonel Teton.

"The Tigress from the South is not alone."

"We are going!" said Leone sternly. "Come, Captain Gideon!"

A strange smile played with the nabob's lips as he stepped forward.

He must have thought: "Is this the end of the long game for gold? Am I to be taken back to the tree where we hung the boy years ago and made to tighten a rope in the hands of this desert Jezebel?"

But then he thought of Shasta Sid—the ferret who never failed to find a trail—of Blonde Buck and his Philistines within stone's throw, and he almost laughed off his fears.

"This woman can't get me through the camp!" said he.

"Or if she does she can never take me to Lone Star."

And the next moment he had obeyed Leone's last command by going forward.

Outside the cabin all was still. Colonel Teton glanced toward the place of the council and saw a light flicker and go out.

The next second he heard a door open and a number of men came into the starlight.

In a second the nabob's heart was in his throat. He had but to lift his voice in one cry for help, or to dash toward the crowd barely two rods away.

As if anticipating such action, Leone suddenly closed up the distance between them.

"I see them," said she in a whisper. "One sign from you stretches a nabob dead on the ground of Shasta! Come!"

He neither spoke nor lifted a hand, and a moment later he was walking away the prisoner of the Tigress of the Southwest—the huntress and shadow of twenty years.

The 'Frisco nabob had found the end of his string.

CHAPTER XL.

THE END OF THE GAME.

BLONDE BUCK and his fellow councilors saw the two figures moving mountainward along the fronts of the shanties, but they were not molested.

If the Shasta toughs had known who they were there would have been some quick, hot work, and thus the expected rescue passed and the California nabob crossed the boundary line with the enemy who had caught him.

A few minutes later Captain Buck opened the door of Colonel Teton's cabin and found the place empty.

If he had surmised the truth he would not have stood staring there a single second.

"The colonel?" said a voice at Blonde Buck's elbow.

"He isn't here," answered the captain of the Philistines, looking into the face of Shasta Sid as he spoke.

The ferret had just come back from somewhere.

"When did he go away?" he queried.

"He was here an hour ago."

Shasta Sid went off.

Morning was breaking once more over canyon and peak, and the first long arrows of light were falling upon five men, who, with white masks on, were leaning forward over the pommeled with gaze riveted upon a certain spot in the trail that ran past their horses' feet.

Two steeds were coming toward them, the hoof-beats sounding plainly on the morning air, but, with their riders, they were still invisible.

The hooded men were almost entirely hidden by tall shrubbery that fringed the trail and rose above their heads, so that the parties soon to come into view could come abreast of them without guessing the ambush.

Presently the eyes that gleamed behind the masks saw the two steeds and their riders.

"Gods!" exclaimed one of the five. "She has caught the nabob."

The other eyes twinkled confirmation.

The two horses advanced abreast.

In one saddle sat a handsome man with hands tied on his back and his limbs lashed to the sides of his steed.

His companion was a woman.

Lady Leone and the nabob!

The Shadow at one end of the line glanced at his companions.

"The nabob is not our prey; the tigress is!" said he.

A moment later Leone and her captive were opposite the horsemen in the shrubbery.

"Halt!"

The occupants of the two saddles started.

The bushes parted and they saw the masked quintette and their revolvers.

Lady Leone turned pale; Colonel Teton grinned.

"The tigress of California is the only one of you wanted by the Shadows of Shasta," continued the man who had halted the pair. "We want the one who left our chief dead on the trail."

"Your chief?"

"Captain Sam!"

Leone's thoughts went back to the death of that man; she saw herself in his clutches, saw his six-shooter covering her, and then saw him drop dead at the crack of Manon's pistol.

The avengers had found the wrong person.

She could not suppress a smile when she thought of this.

"You trail-dogs must find the right slayer before you show your teeth," answered she. "This prisoner is going with me to the scene of his infamy. I have at last closed in on Gulch Gideon. He knows it all, and, gentlemen, he would give you a million to have you shoot me dead from my horse."

Despite the menace of the five revolvers and while she spoke, Lady Leone drew a revolver from her belt.

"This golden spider, whose webs hang all over California, knows the truth at last," she went on. "He knows that he has raised the child of his enemy; that the true heir to his millions is one who has enough of her own to touch a single nugget of them all. I told him everything coming down here. Were he to go back to Shasta's capital, which he never shall, despite the coolness and cunning of his yellow ferret, he would enter Queen Stella's cabin and call her the daughter of the nabob."

The five masks along the trail were seen to start.

"Is that true, Colonel Teton?" asked the leader.

"I believe it is," answered the Californian.

"Nothing was ever truer," was Leone's reply. "He now sees in me the person who made it possible for him to raise in luxury, though he hated her, the child of his enemy. I am Manon's mother; he is the father of Stella, the Queen of the Bonanza! Gentlemen, shall I pass with my prisoner?"

The Shadows looked at each other.

Colonel Teton did not speak, but looked into the eyes of the men who held his fate in their hands.

At last Leone raised her eyes to the towering rocks above.

Suddenly she turned pale and seemed to fasten her gaze upon some object far overhead.

She had seen a human figure there. It disappeared in a moment, then came into view again, and then once more was lost.

All at once it dropped from a clump of bushes upon the trail itself, and Leone saw a man come forward with gaze riveted on her—and her alone.

"Captain Sid, the Shasta ferret!"

The hat of the nabob's trail-hound was thrown back, showing his intensely black eyes full of triumph, and his broad yellow forehead and masses of raven hair.

Now every one saw him, and once more the look of joy was in the nabob's orbs.

Sid had found his master. Not only this, but he had also found the tigress.

"I'll attend to her!" he exclaimed, covering Leone with his left hand, while he glanced at the Shadows. "You want the kitten, not the mother."

He was now within twenty yards of Leone and her prisoner, standing in the center of the trail, his stalwart figure erect and every nerve at his command.

"Forward!—past me," he suddenly exclaimed, stepping aside.

Leone leaned toward the nabob.

"Alone!" continued Sid. "Leave your prisoner where he is."

"Never!"

The man in the path came on again.

"I come—alone!" cried Leone, and she went toward Colonel Teton, but not as before.

This time her hand darted toward his face; then there was a report that made the mountain ring, and with the repeated cry of "I come—alone, Shasta Sid!" she struck her steed with the spur and shot forward like a bullet.

The woman's horse was upon the ferret before he could lift a hand, or divine her intention. He caught at the rein as she went by, but his clutch did not hold for the butt of her revolver, descending upon his wrist, numbed his arm to the elbow!

She was gone in a moment.

Already ten hands were taking Colonel Teton from his horse as Sid ran forward.

"Follow her, Shasta!" said the wounded man.

"To the end, colonel—to the death!" was the reply.

They laid the nabob where the grass looked softest; they saw the wild glare of vengeance fade from the eyes, and, when Captain Sid stood up once more, the man whom he had served so long and so well—the prince of a dozen bonanzas, lay dead in the morning light!

The old foe had won; the claws of the tigress had found his heart's blood; and the victim of the Lynch-court of Lone Star Ranch had been avenged!

Blonde Buck and his fellow Philistines waited a long time for the nabob's return, but he came not.

By and by Stella was told the story of Leone's vengeance. In the little office in her bonanza, with no one by but Shasta Sid, she had the one mystery of her life fully solved, and she knew that she was Monte Cristo Teton's own child and heir.

After his revelation, Captain Sid went away, and Sunset became a wholly different place. The dead-line in the sand disappeared. Philistine and Champion, for the first time, "buried the hatchet," and the mountain lions fraternized with good feeling.

Stella did not claim a dollar of Colonel Teton's millions; but, some time after she had become Theo's wife, she gave her bonanza to the pards of Sunset, to be held by them in common, and, for the first time in many years, turned her back upon the scenes of her exciting life.

Finding that Manon was not the nabob's child, but "the tigress's kitten," as she was now called, Blonde Buck gave up his game for her hand, and she drifted away in search of her mother; and the Shadows of Shasta lost her altogether.

Just one year later a man whom the reader would have recognized on sight, came suddenly upon a horse and his rider lying in a heap at the foot of a mountain wall in Southern Arizona.

It was growing dark, and he had to dismount to see who the rider was.

"Ten to one that I've found her!" said he, as he left the saddle.

The next moment he uttered a cry of mingled disappointment and surprise.

Under the black mane of the dead horse lay a woman's face, and his keen eyes showed him that it was white and rigid.

"I've followed her to the end of the trail, but

I did not want to see it end thus," he murmured; and then he drew out from under the steed the body of Leone, the Avenger.

She had fallen from the trail above with her horse, and the tireless trail-hound, who had followed her from the day of her revenge, was never to know the secret of her death-descent.

It was Shasta Sid's hand that gave her a mountain burial, and when that was done, he went down the wild pathway and vanished.

Crimson Clint, the once captain of the Philistines, never came back to shield the man he had deserted, and Gold Gomez, the Mexican-blooded sport, and the more than half-lover of Queen Stella, likewise kept aloof from the Sun-set capital.

As to Doctor Doc, whose last attempt to get even with Monte Cristo Teton had failed, leaving him for Leone at last, he closed his life in another gold camp, believing to the end that he had avenged his Mazeppa ride across the Devil's Desert.

The end has come.

The millions of the 'Frisco nabob went to Shasta Sid, Stella refusing to touch them. Her wealth was great enough, and the child that looked like Theo was the sunshine of her life.

THE END.

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- 526 Death-Grip, the Tenderfoot Detective.
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BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.
- 209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
- 222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
- 248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
- 274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
- 289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
- 298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
- 308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
- 315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
- 327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
- 337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
- 348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
- 368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.
- 483 Flush Fred, the River Sharp.

BY COL. THOMAS H. MONSTERY.

- 82 Iron Wrist, the Swordmaster.
- 126 The Demon Duelist; or, The League of Steel.
- 143 The Czar's Spy; or, The Nihilist League.
- 150 El Rubio Bravo, King of the Swordsman.
- 157 Mourad, the Mameluke; or, The Three Sword-masters.
- 169 Corporal Cannon, the Man of Forty Duels.
- 236 Champion Sam; or, The Monarchs of the Show.
- 262 Fighting Tom, the Terror of the Toughs.
- 322 Spring-Heel Jack; or, The Masked Mystery.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON.

- 176 Lady Jaguar, the Robber Queen.
- 194 Don Sombrero, the California Road Gent.
- 202 Cactus Jack, the Giant Guide.
- 219 The Scorpion Brothers; or, Mad Tom's Mission.
- 223 Canyon Dave, the Man of the Mountain.
- 227 Buckshot Ben, the Man-Hunter of Idaho.
- 237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
- 245 Barranca Bill, the Revolver Champion.
- 255 Bullet Head, the Colorado Bravo.
- 263 Iron-Armed Abe, the Hunchback Destroyer.
- 266 Leopard Luke the King of Horse-Thieves.
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- 276 Texas Chick, the Southwest Detective.
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- 211 Colonel Plunger; or, The Unknown Sport.
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- 268 Magic Mike, the Man of Frills.
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- 333 Derringer Dick, the Man with the Drop.
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- 256 Double Dan, the Dastard; or, The Pirates.
- 264 The Crooked Three.
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- 282 The Merciless Marauders; or, Carl's Revenge.
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- 511 Paint Pete, the Prairie Patrol.

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476 Bob Brent, the Buccaneer.
482 Ocean Tramps.
489 The Pirate Hunter.
493 The Scouts of the Sea.
510 El Moro, the Corsair Commodore.
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587 Conrad, the Sailor Spy.

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297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
385 Will Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
437 Deep Duke; or, The Man of Two Lives.
442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
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455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
470 The Duke of Dakota.
479 Gladiator Gabe, the Samson of Sassajack.
486 Kansas Kitten, the Northwest Detective.
492 Border Bullet, the Prairie Sharpshooter.
498 Central Pacific Paul, the Mail Train Spy.
506 Uncle Honest, the Peacemaker of Hornets' Nest.
513 Texas Tartar, the Man With Nine Lives.
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531 Saddle-Chief Kit, the Prairie Centaur.
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80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
114 The Gentleman from Pike.
171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.
299 Three of a Kind; or, Tiger Dick, Iron Despard and the Sportive Sport.
338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.
472 Six Foot Si; or, The Man to "Tie To."
502 Bareback Buck, the Centaur of the Plains.
522 The Champion Three.
544 The Back to Back Pards.
567 Captain Midnight, the Man of Craft.
583 Captain Adair, the Cattle King.

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33 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine.
34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw.
35 Kentuck, the Sport; or, Dick Talbot of the Mines.
36 Injun Dick; or, The Death-Shot of Shasta.
38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip.
41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake.
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63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of Gulf.
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75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison and Street.
77 The Fresh of Frisco; or, The Heiress.
79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy.
81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.
84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.
97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred.
101 The Man from New York.
107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.
112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective.
130 Captain Volcano or, The Man of Red Revolvers.
161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Hunt.
173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.
196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
320 The Genteel Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent.
354 Red Richard; or, The Crimson Cross Brand.
363 Crowningshield, the Detective.
370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked to New York.
391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective.
408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detective.
423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
440 The High Horse of the Pacific.
461 The Fresh on the Rio Grande.
465 The Actor Detective.
475 Chin Chin, the Chinese Detective.
490 The Lone Hand in Texas.
497 The Fresh in Texas.
520 The Lone Hand on the Caddo.
529 The Fresh in New York.
537 Blake, the Mountain Lion.
556 Fresh, the Sport-Chevalier.
562 Lone Hand, the Shadow.
570 The Actress Detective; or, The Invisible Hand.
577 Tom of California.
586 The Silver Sharp Detective.

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- 28 Three-Fingered Jack, the Road-Agent.
30 Gospel George; or, Fiery Fred, the Outlaw.
40 Long-Haired Pards; or, The Tarters of the Plains.
45 Old Bull's-Eye, the Lightning Shot.
47 Pacific Pete, the Prince of the Revolver.
50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.
64 Double-Sight, the Death Shot.
67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
71 Captain Cool Blade; or, Mississippi Man Shark.
88 Big George; or, The Five Outlaw Brothers.
105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters.
127 Sol Scott, the Masked Miner.
141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.
154 Joaquin, the Saddle King.
165 Joaquin, the Terrible.
170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.
180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona.
197 Revolver Rob; or, The Belle of Nugget Camp.
201 Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt.
233 The Old Boy of Tombstone.
241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.
249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
257 Death Trap Diggings; or, A Hard Man from Way Back.
283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand.
292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout.
302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules.
317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary.
331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwaters.
387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
403 The Nameless Sport.
409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.
426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Spy of the Secret Service.
433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.
438 Oklahoma Nick.
443 A Cool Hand; or, Pistol Johnny's Picnic.
450 The Rustler Detective.
458 Dutch Dan, the Pilgrim from Spitzemberg.
466 Old Rough and Ready, the Sage of Sundown.
474 Daddy Dead-Eye, the Despot of Dew Drop.
488 The Thoroughbred Sport.
495 Rattlepate Rob; or, The Roundhead's Reprisal.
504 Solemn Saul, the Sad Man from San Saba.
514 Gabe Gunn, the Grizzly from Ginseng.
527 Dandy Andy, the Diamond Detective.
535 Dandy Dutch, the Decorator from Dead-Lift.
541 Major Magnet, the Man of Nerve; or, The Muck-a-Mucks of Animas.
547 The Buried Detective; or, Saul Sunday's Six Sensations.
555 Grip-Sack Sid, the Sample Sport.
564 The Grip-Sack Sharp; or, The Seraphs of Sodom.
576 Silver-Tongued Sid.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES.

- 278 Hercules Goldspur, the Man of the Velvet Hand.
294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.
321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit.
335 Flash Dan, the Nabob; or, Blades of Bowie Bar.
340 Cool Conrad, the Dakota Detective.
347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand."
352 The Desperate Dozen.
365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow.
374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.
382 The Bonanza Band; or, Dread Don of Cool Clan.
392 The Lost Bonanza; or, The Boot of Silent Hound.
400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.
407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick.
413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.
421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow.
434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.
441 The California Sharp.
447 Volcano, the Frisco Spy.
453 Captain Coldgrip's Long Trail.
460 Captain Coldgrip, the Detective.
468 Coldgrip in Deadwood.
480 Hawkspear, the Man with a Secret.
487 Sunshine Sam, a Chip of the Old Block.
496 Richard Redfire, the Two Worlds' Detective.
505 Phil Fox, the Genteel Spotter.
512 Captain Velvet's Big Stake.
523 Reynard of Red Jack; or, The Lost Detective.
532 Jack Javert, the Independent Detective.
543 The Magnate Detective.
550 Silk Hand, the Mohave Ferret.
559 Danton, the Shadow Sharp.
569 Captain Cobra, the Hooded Mystery.
579 Old Cormorant, the Bowery Shadow.

BY JACKSON KNOX—"Old Hawk."

- 386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.
424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
444 The Magic Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
462 The Circus Detective.
467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
477 Dead-arm Brandt.
485 Rowlock, the Harbor Detective.
494 The Detective's Spy.
501 Springsteel Steve, the Retired Detective.
509 Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective.
515 Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond Field Detective.
536 Old Falcon's Foe; or, The Matchless Detective's Swell Job.
548 Falconbridge, the Sphinx Detective.
561 The Thug King; or, The Falcon Detective's Invisible Foe.
574 Old Falcon's Double.
582 Joram, the Detective Expert.

BY BUFFALO BILL (Hon. W. F. Cody).

- 53 Death-Trailer, the Chief of Scouts.
83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.

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- 588 Sandy Sands, the Sharp from Snap City; or, Hoist by His Own Petard. By J. E. Badger.
589 Prince Hal, the Rattling Detective; or, Pat Lyon, the Master Locksmith. By Charles Morris.
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